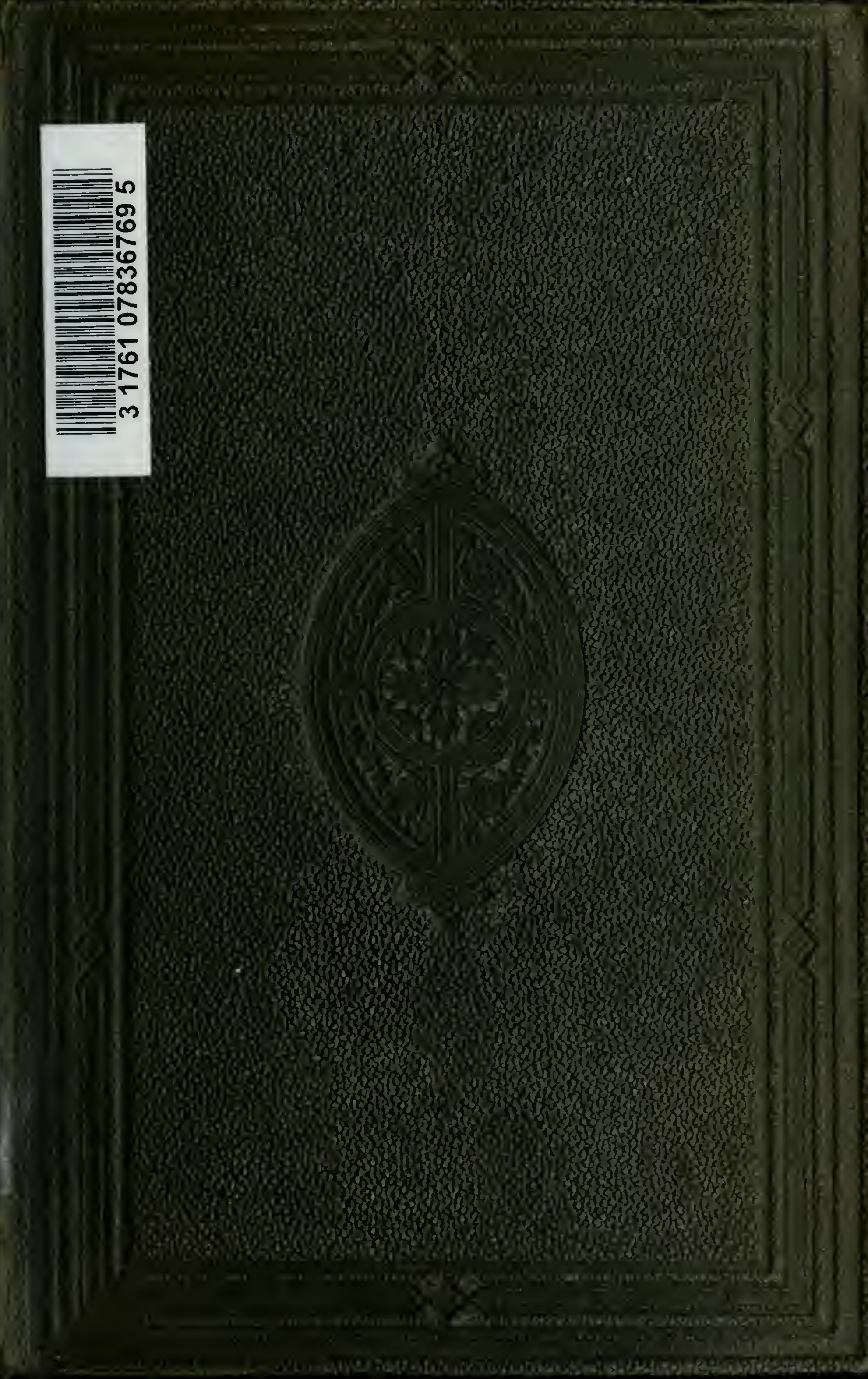

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MEMORIAL EDITION

OF

COLLECTED WORKS

OF

W. J. FOX.

VOL. IX.

REPORTS OF LECTURES AT SOUTH-PLACE CHAPEL, FINSBURY,

SUPPLEMENTARY TO

THE COURSE ON THE RELIGIOUS IDEAS.

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REPORTS OF LECTURES DELIVERED AT THE CHAPEL
IN SOUTH PLACE, FINSBURY,

ON

1. THE INFLUENCES WHICH MODIFY THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RELIGIOUS IDEAS;

2. OBJECTIONS TO "THE RELIGIOUS IDEAS;"

3. THE HISTORY OF RELIGIOUS THOUGHT;

AND

4. THE TRUE LIFE OF CHRIST.

PREFACE.

THIS volume—the ninth of the series—is the first containing matter previously unpublished. In the autumn and winter of 1848-9 Mr. Fox delivered a course of Lectures on "The Religious Ideas." These were published in one volume, under that title, in 1849; and they form the concluding part of the eighth volume of this series. The various strictures which the work drew forth from writers of very diverse opinions in theology, subsequently induced Mr. Fox to devote at least six other courses of lectures, forty-six in number, to its defence and further exposition. Of these, four courses are published, for the first time, in this volume. The remaining two courses—on, 1, The Scriptural Expression of "The Religious Ideas;" and, 2, Moral Philosophy in connection therewith — will form the first part of the tenth volume. Like all the lectures previously published, they were reported by a stenographer; but they have all received the benefit, to some extent, of Mr. Fox's own revision. Viewed in connection with "The Religious Ideas" and with each other, they are of considerable value and interest, as expressing his final convictions, and exemplifying his happiest methods of conducting theological controversy.

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ON

THE CAUSES AND INFLUENCES

WHICH MODIFY THE

DEVELOPMENT OF THE RELIGIOUS IDEAS.

THE

COLLECTED WORKS OF W. J. FOX.

ON THE CAUSES AND INFLUENCES WHICH MODIFY THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RELIGIOUS IDEAS.

LECTURE I.—INTRODUCTORY.

March 4th, 1849.

I INTEND the lectures which I now recommence to bear a supplementary and explanatory relation to the course which I last delivered in this place—those on the Religious Ideas. And the object of those which I shall now give is, to trace the causes and influences which modify those religious ideas in their development; so that, although the materials and constituent principles of all religions are the same, and have their root and origin in the intellectual and moral constitution of human nature, yet, in their actual developments, they give rise to an unbounded variety of religious forms. The influencing causes which, from the same principles, work out this diversity of forms, —these are the subject of the lectures which I now commence.

On the present occasion I shall attempt no more than this,—to recall to your minds the purport and tendency of that course on the religious ideas, and to shadow forth the outline of the present course on the modifying causes and influences which, in the common process of things, are exercised over those ideas. That course consisted of five parts: the first enumerated the principal religious ideas, and endeavoured to show their universality and their verity; the second part treated of that idea of revelation which has become almost identified with the notion of religion, and is, in fact, in common speech, a synonymous word for it; the third discussed the idea of God, as it arises in the human mind, and as it unfolds itself into the several secondary ideas of creation, of providence, of redemption; the fourth part treated of the religious notions that arise from reflectiveness in man, from turning inward his thoughts upon his own nature, constitution, origin, and destiny; and the fifth and concluding part took a general view of the religion of humanity thus elucidated in its application to various questions of social or individual interest. On each of these, for the sake of bringing them to your recollection more distinctly, I shall say a few words.

The first part, or introductory, consisted of two lectures, in which, the leading religious ideas having been enumerated, it was shown that they were—in the sense in which the phrase is commonly applied to topics of this description—universal,—as universal as the paternal or maternal instinct, which may be violated, and is grossly violated occasionally, in particular cases, but which yet is allowed to belong to our nature. In like manner, the religious ideas, though they may have no claim to the now obsolete rank of innate ideas, yet are results that flow so readily, with such facility, and with such commonness, from our mental and moral constitution, as to be, in the ordinary sense of the term, universal; and, by analogy with the different faculties and powers of man, and with the more important and influential of his conceptions, they argue their own objective reality. The conception of God in the human mind is an indication of the actual existence of God, as the Author of the human mind. It is of importance, then, to trace what these ideas are,—so widely diffused, widely as human nature itself,—so permanently enduring, permanently as the successive generations of the race of mankind,—and asserting by their effects their own identity with the human constitution.

The first and most obvious of the religious ideas is that of a revelation—the subject of the third lecture of that series. Revelation is discovery. The religious ideas, according to the views here taken, are seen by looking inwards; while a common superstition ascribes to them, in all cases, an external origin. But there is an association that will arise in the mind between a discovery and a discoverer—between enlightenment and an enlightener. Man may feel that these ideas are the spontaneous growth of his own mind; but yet they have in them something so peculiar, so much above his own mind, that he necessarily looks without, looks upward, for their author. The revelation may be made in him, as well as to him; it may be made by him, as well as for him. And unless this had been the case, the notion of revelation, however misapplied, would not have been so prevailing as it actually is. Revelation is discovery; and we discover a thing by the mental sight, as well as by the bodily. We discover by reflection, as well as by observation. Indeed, we are quite as far off —if not farther—from the end of the discoveries that may be made by looking within ourselves, as we are from the end of the discoveries that may be made by looking outwards. No telescope, however admirably constructed,—whatever its power of penetrating into the abysses of space, —whatever the facility with which it analyses nebulæ, once thought mere clouds in ether, into their constituent stars, —however remote the objects which it may bring comparatively near to our contemplation, and make subject to our calculations,—has discoveries in store like those which await the man who honestly and simply dedicates himself to reflection. He will find there abysses yet more profound, truths yet more remote, and will gain from himself oracles wiser than that of Delphos, or of Jerusalem itself. Revelation is discovery. Words and phrases exciting no distinct thought are not revelation, whatever they pretend. The Athanasian Creed, with its jargon of "three coequal persons, and yet not three coequal gods, but one God," is not a revelation. It reveals, unfolds, discovers nothing whatever to the mind, but puts a few unmeaning words into the mouth. Nor are words, by any means, the most fitting vehicle for religious revelation. They are always fraught with ambiguity; they are ambiguous when first spoken or written; their ambiguity multiplies at every succeeding step; it is increased by the change of customs and associations; it is multiplied yet more by transfusion into other languages; and is multiplied again by the other and new associations, altogether alien from the original associations, which grow up and cling and cluster around those words. It is a most imperfect and ineffective vehicle of revelation, that of words. Thought, presenting itself in its purity to the contemplative and reflecting mind, is far more valuable; and this is a species of revelation which has been enjoyed in all countries, in all ages, which is in affinity with human nature, and is always at hand for human nature to avail itself of, if so disposed.

The third part of the series, comprising lectures 4, 5, 6, and 7, related to Deity,—to God, that wonderful conception, that infinite thought, which yet is sure to come into the finite mind,—that eternal thought, which yet is sure to come into the mind of mortal birth, and in this state of such limited duration;—an idea which at once makes man feel his grandeur and his insignificance,—grandeur in being able to conceive such an idea as that of God, and insignificance in his own powers and faculties in the presence of the very thought which thus springs within himself. He stands abashed, rebuked, humbled before it,—stands reverently and adoringly before what may be deemed his own sense, the creation of his own mind,—although, when he looks further, he fails not to see, not merely that he has not created the idea of God, but that it has created him. The different relations in which the Deity is regarded as standing towards man, which afterwards flow from this original conception, were traced in that portion of the course.

The next part, comprising lectures 8, 9, and 10, went on to the religious ideas which have their relation to human nature in its reflectiveness,—as these have their relation to human nature in its conception of Divinity. For man, thus led to form a notion of, and sit in judgment upon, the existence and being of a God, of course feels himself authorised and impelled to sit in judgment on himself, his own nature, powers, and perceptions; and in ascertaining his place in the scale of the universe, he does not plead guilty to being one of the merely animal creation. The consciousness of a better and a brighter destiny is strong within him. Conscience works in him an early perception—a perception that usually comes anterior to calculation—of the difference of right and wrong, of good and evil. The social principle works in him, generating that much-abused idea of a Church, or the spontaneous union of the good and of those who are seeking after goodness, of the wise and those who are seeking after wisdom. And his aspirations, tending towards the highest good of which his being is susceptible, picture forth to him that heaven which, under that name, or under some appellation or other, all religions have placed at the closing and blessed scene of their speculations.

Then, having done all this, we arrived at the conclusion that there is a religion of humanity; that religion is a thing anterior to and above all religions; that there is something more in it than their mere specialties. The same course was adopted in these lectures which has often been pursued by those who have sought to solve the entangled problem of what were the essentials of Christianity. From an early period they laid down the rule, that essentials were those things which had been assented to by Christians always, every where, and by all. Whilst this leaves very little of Christian peculiarity, and demolishes the specialties of all the most prominent creeds and churches, it brings Christianity into harmony and almost entire identification with the broader principles of a religion of humanity, which is the basis of the whole. And there, far more strongly,—as strongly as the inherent diversities of human nature permit,—do we find the truths which are assented to always, every where, and by all.

It was then argued that these views of religion were fatal to its political character or establishment; that they exercised an important influence upon the nature, character, and tendency of education; that they showed it to be abused when made the means of a man stamping his own image, intellectual or moral, on the rising generation; that they required education to be the development of each according to the tendencies of his individual nature;—and the course concluded by a reference to the effects upon the mind of the individual, in the realisation of what has been called the life of God in the soul of man.

In this course of lectures I was, in fact, giving a summary of my own teachings in this place, and of the results and tendencies of my own mind in religious matters. They might not be topics admitting much of the ordinary illustration and force of lectures; but they served me to epitomise and to show the outline of that form,—which I would refer to your own minds to animate,—of the successive teachings through many years which have been here placed before you. And it is for each mind, by its own action, to give life to whatever can be communicated from one mind to another. It is for each mind to call down that spirit from heaven, by which alone it can be animated and made a lasting and practical thing. And an object which I deem paramount to all others in the promotion of religion is, that it be a vital spirit, and not a mere congeries of dead propositions or external forms.

But it could not fail to be noticed in this course, that there were material aberrations, imperfect developments, perversions of these ideas; that they were presented sometimes in lovely, but very frequently in repulsive forms; that they have been connected with systems that tended to degrade humanity, as well as with those that tended to exalt it; that, in short, a variety of causes and influences were always at work to prevent their being contemplated and recognised in their native simplicity and grandeur. It is these causes that I design to trace in the lectures which I shall in future deliver; and I will now enumerate the principal of them.

The religious ideas are modified, first, by idiosyncrasies, either of the individual constitution or of races of mankind. The dream has passed away which was once cherished of making man what you pleased by the mere force of education, or by any arrangement whatever of outward circumstances. It has been found that there is something within which will not yield,—that there are minds which you cannot shape or fashion, however dexterous may be your arrangements, or however complete your supervision of the early instruction of such persons. There are varieties in mankind as great as there are in the leaves. One leaf is like another leaf, as one man is like another man; but no two are so identical that the observant eye of the naturalist or of the artist does not detect perceptible differences. Now, these differences must needs have their influence over every idea which either comes into the mind from without, or which springs up from within. The tendencies and the faculties of the individual have a power which prevails over the whole system. Milton and Shakespeare could never have had precisely the same Deity. Coleridge has remarked on their development of this idea, as far as it can be observed in their writings, that the God of the one was a God *ab extrâ,* a God from without, presiding over, ruling, and ordering the universe; while the Deity of the other was a pervading principle, manifesting itself from within each operation of the universe,—shooting out, as it were, in the different minds of the individual beings whom it animated and sustained. Christianity is preached to the negroes; a fantastic sort of Christianity it usually becomes when they take upon them to delineate that which they believe themselves to have received;—so much so, that every one prepares for something ludicrous the very moment a negro preachment is mentioned. And is it possible that the Christianity of the clear-headed, the governing, the planning, and far-seeing Saxon race should ever be the Christianity of the unthinking, the pliable, and yet affectionate Negro race? Without going into any speculations of this kind, Dr. Channing, from mere observation, repeatedly declared his conviction that it was the destiny of the Negro race to present to the world a new phase of Christianity. He anticipated that it would be a beautiful one, that it would develop more of the spirit of love in Christianity than had perhaps yet been exemplified by any of its professors. But—whatever becomes of that notion, which mere observation forced on his mind—the perception that there is such a diversity must lead us to the conclusion, that these diversities of idiosyncrasy in individuals and in races are causes by which the religious ideas must be subjected to a certain set of modifications, discriminating religions from one another in their developments.

The second set of modifying influences which I shall endeavour to trace is that of nature. The phenomena of nature, if they have not produced any one religion, have yet largely affected all religions; and we may trace, in the different religions of the earth, some indications of the climate and region in which they originated. It is when he has ascended the mountain's top that man looks up to the sun in homage, as it rises in its majesty and glory upon the world. Fire-worship and the religion of the mountains have been one in earth's history from the earliest period, and over the most extensive regions,—from the glowing climate of Persia to the cold regions of Caledonia, where the bale-fires were accustomed, in bygone times, to kindle their beacon-light upon the mountain-tops. Caverns—imitated very often in temples afterwards—have their associations with the religion of oracles. The lovely groves of Greece and the dark forests of the north have both tended towards polytheistic notions—producing the graceful gods of Greece in the one instance, and the multiplied demons and forest-fiends and water-fiends of the northern tribes in the other. While twice from the barren sands, the plains of Arabia, in their wide-spread majesty,—the majesty of unbroken extent, of illimitable space,—twice has the cry been raised of monotheism; twice from those plains has gone forth to the world the proclamation that God is one; and humanity has acknowledged it through its millions.

The third source of influence and modification in religious ideas has been that of art,—of art, as differently cultivated and developed according to the tendencies of different nations. Art began its work upon religion in ancient Egypt; it multiplied emblematical forms and representations of the Divine attributes and operations, and connected the notion of Divine power with the phenomena of a physical year; until polytheism was multiplied to a most extraordinary extent, and the country was overrun with deities. Moses recoiled from this; the Mosaic system commenced—though the injunction, such are the tendencies of our nature, could not be strictly kept—with a cautionary negation of art; and endeavoured to sustain the conception of Divine spirituality by prohibiting any emblem or likeness of any thing to be honoured as a development of the Deity, "either in the heavens above, the earth beneath, or the waters under the earth." The different developments of art in ancient Greece and in modern Italy,—the statue and the painting,—what an effect these have had on religious thoughts and associations! How refined, how sensuous, and yet how exalted have they made it, giving to it a peculiar form, which no doubt has its place—and a most important place—in the history of the progress of the human mind on this subject! As the poet speaks of those luxuriant trees in the east, which, bending their branches to the ground, strike root there, spring up again, and form a continuous grove,—where, as he says,

> "A pious mind's first impulse would be prayer,"—

so are there forms of religious architecture—such as those, for instance, exhibited in the cathedrals of which Europe well may boast—that tend to keep up this solemnity of feeling, which are in accordance with that long-drawn tone of reverential music to which the heart never fails to respond, however at variance the creed taught or the prayers and praises expressed may be with its own conceptions of both political and religious truth. Here, therefore, we find another and a strong influence upon the development of the religious ideas.

The next is that of literature. Literature and religion were originally identical: they were the same thing in Egypt. The sacred books of Hermes taught not merely creeds and prayers, but they taught the arts of life, the knowledge of healing, and an acquaintance with natural phenomena. With the Jews—if we may judge from the sort of works that have found place in the Old-Testament canon—every book was a religious book, a sacred thing, though it were only the light song of a seemingly licentious monarch. All religions almost have their sacred books; and with a country that advances in knowledge, and where literature springs up, those books become in time formal rather than vital. Then the actual power of religion is transferred to works which are not professedly religious. In our own country it is the philosophers, the poets, the historians, who have been really the priests of the common religion of intelligent and cultivated minds. If I were to ask what is the religion of such in the present day, I should look for it, not to the Scriptures, nor to the professed instructions of the Church, but to that long train of great men,—such men as Chaucer, and Shakespeare, and Bacon, and Locke, and Milton; to those whose works, entering into the thoughts and studies of all such persons, give them their tone and colour, and from which a religion might be produced of a very different and of a far loftier character than that which is actually professed in our established forms. Homer,—why, Homer made the gods of Greece before Phidias sculptured them in marble! He took the blind, the unconscious, the human powers of the perverted deities of Egypt or of the Phœnicians, and he gave them vitality, he gave them external form, he gave them the human shape,—but idealised and beautified and exalted.

He gave them distinctiveness of character. And thus he made the gods of Greece, as the prophet Isaiah aggrandised the Jehovah of Moses.

The fifth cause of modification of the religious ideas is in events. Not that actual events—the changes and revolutions recorded in history—are in themselves any thing more than symptoms. They are the symptoms of tendency, of the tendency of the constitution of man and of the world,—symptoms thrown up from time to time, to show us which way the current flows, and to enable us to prophesy the future from observation of the past. But still, though only symptoms, they are links in the chain of external influences, well worth studying in reference to this particular view of religious history. For instance: had the Egyptians dealt in a different manner with the Israelites,—had they not oppressed them, had they not kept them secluded and become their taskmasters; had they allowed the identification, the amalgamation, which had commenced, which commenced in the person of Joseph, to proceed, and take its natural course,—had the Jews risen into their offices of state, had the Jews intermarried with their families in the different ranks and gradations of society,—the Jews and the Egyptians would have become one people. There would not have been the demarcation of oppression; there would not have been the rooted associations and hopes of race, kept up from generation to generation; there would not have been that fierce antagonism which at last raised the cry of an oppressed nation, humbled the proudest empire on the face of the world, and led to the establishment of a religion which was for long ages to outlive the existence of that empire. But for such oppressions—even supposing the course of things to have gone on as I have been imagining—where would Judaism have been? where the religion of the wilderness and Mount Sinai? where the peculiar theology of the Israelitish people? It would not have existed. And if there had been no Judaism, where would have been Christianity,—born of it, nurtured in its institutions, in its peculiarities, turning in infancy to lisp its language, carrying its sacred books over the world? Apparently the history of mankind would have been widely different, had the Jews not been kept a separate and oppressed people, by the prejudices, the cupidity, and the wanton tyranny of their Egyptian masters. So in later times: had Erasmus been Luther, the Reformation would not have been a severance from the Church of Rome; it would have been a change, a modification, a mitigation of superstition and abuse within the Church of Rome. And, of course, the history of Europe would have been widely dissimilar from that day to this. Many more instances might be adduced, and may, perhaps, come before us when we arrive at this branch of the subject; but I trust I have said enough to show that events,—though only symptomatic, though not to be regarded as if they were an absolute creation for a specific purpose; being only indicative of the tendency of things, and, therefore, only doing that to which something analogous, if not perfectly identical, might be produced in other ways and by other means,—still events have, within their limited sphere, had their agency in the modification of religious ideas.

So have institutions. The effects of different forms of government are very perceptible: democracy, aristocracy, monarchy,—these all have a bearing on the modification and direction in which religion germinates in the minds of those who are subject to those governments. Even the little petty institutions of churches and congregations have their effect. The Presbyterians of England, at an early period, gave way in their reception of communicants at the Lord's table to a liberality of feeling which was by no means strong in them. That was the starting-point of the difference of the Presbyterians of England from those of Scotland. And what was the result? Why, that in the course of a few successive generations the Presbyterians of England became, almost to a church or a congregation, heretical. They branched off from the others, until there is nothing Presbyterian about them but the name. So considerable a difference in creed and modes of worship has arisen from this mere diversity of a comparatively unimportant social institution.

And, finally, we must look to that great corrector and great revealer, science, as the most important agency of all in the modification of religious thought. What firmly believed doctrines has not science expelled from the world? What testimony of divines, or churches, or councils, or scriptures, can stand against the demonstrations of science? Where is the belief in demoniacs, once so prevalent, and sanctioned by scripture? Where is the belief in witchcraft, once so prevalent, and sanctioned by scripture also—the scriptures of the Old Testament—even to the infliction of capital punishment? Where is the belief of that local heaven, towards which ascent was made in ancient times? These, and many other notions which might be enumerated, have all given way before that steady onward march of science, which no superstition can long arrest,—which corrects fallacies, but which also reveals truths,—which builds up as fast or faster than it destroys,—which introduces knowledge more largely than it rebukes and expels ignorance,—and which is, in fact, at this time, the revelation to the world of creation in its gradual nature, its long processes, and its constant tendency towards one great result.

Such is the course of illustration, supplementary to the lectures referred to, on which I am about to enter. And, however imperfectly the one or the other may be placed before you, it is on your own minds that I rely for giving both to the one and to the other that attention to which they are entitled. I ask for them not an analytic, a critical, a logical attention. I wish to recommend them as objects of contemplation, of thoughtfulness, of reflectiveness, of meditation. I wish you to look at them as you look at some great object in nature; endeavouring to drink in the whole tide of associations that is capable of flowing from it into the soul of man. It is in this view, I think, that you will derive most advantage from these topics. Look at them as the traveller looks at some huge mountain, basking as it were in the sun, stretching its enormous length, and raising its lofty summit, with all the magic of colour reflected in rainbow-hues upon its surface, the productions of different climates diversifying the long ascent, fountains gushing out from its sides—their waters spreading till they become rivers—the prospect from its summit commanding the breadth of kingdoms,—a majestic object to look at, or to look from! The time may come, and there may be appropriate means, and it may become a fitting occupation, to take its altitude, to measure the length of its ascent, to speculate upon its constituent materials or its specific gravity; but let all this be postponed to the impression which is its first great lesson, and its most important lesson, for human senses and for human thought. Let that impression be received in its entirety,—it will well repay you. The sentiments of grandeur, of majesty, of infinity, of eternity, will grow upon the mind: you will find this thought rising and swelling within you; you will compare it with the changing and ever-shifting scenes around. Seasons and years and centuries have come and gone, while it stood there in its greatness. Towers and palaces and cities, as well as the huts of the labourer and the peasant, have arisen at its base, have arisen and have vanished away; and yet there it stands; fit emblem of those ideas—those religious ideas—eternal in the midst of mutation, which I am recommending to your thoughts in these lectures; fit record of the truth, that while change is around us, that while even the religious thoughts themselves are subject to so great modifications, and modifications so strangely varied,—the ideas themselves remain unaffected.

> "The presence of perpetual change
> Is ever on the earth;"

but that change is utterly insignificant, compared with the magnificent and enduring presence of perpetual truth and love.

LECTURE II.

ON INDIVIDUAL PECULIARITIES AS A MODIFYING INFLUENCE ON THE RELIGIOUS IDEAS.

March 18*th*, 1849.

THE individual peculiarities of the human constitution as a modifying influence upon the development of the religious ideas,—this is the subject on which I have now to say a few words.

The attention of philosophers has been generally directed to what is common to mankind; physical characteristics, the mental faculties, the moral tendencies of our nature, as they are found in all,—these have been their worthy objects of contemplation. And there is much common to all humanity which well deserves our attention and our reverence. Man is broadly distinguished from all other animals. He alone, with his erect posture, commands the earth by his gaze, and looks up to the heavens. He alone can endure every climate and region, and turn the peculiarities of every climate and region to account for his own subsistence and enjoyment. He alone inherits the accumulated knowledge and power of preceding generations. Of himself, but still more from this endowment, he works in a sphere as far wider than that of the inferior animals, as the broad plain of earth is beyond the paddock in which the sheep feeds and fattens and dies. He alone connects the seen with the unseen; the present with the long past, and with the yet remote future; and thus dignifies his limited existence. And to analyse these various faculties, to contemplate the gradual unfolding of these "high, capacious powers," that "lie folded up in man,"—man universal, and not merely in a few favoured individuals of our race,—this has been generally the object of philosophy.

The unity of mankind is a magnificent fact; the illustration of it is a task alike useful and sublime; and the religious ideas partake in this unity of humanity. Traverse the globe; observe men in all their diversities of manners, government, modes of occupation,—you find religion every where: barbarous with the savage; enlightened with the civilised; simple with the simple; pompous with the luxurious;—but still it is there. Look at the past; and what history is there that aspires to completeness without a chapter on religion,—often the most important and interesting of the record? Or go back beyond the time of authenticated history: in those gray stones, those circular temples open to the heavens, the record of priesthoods and systems that have passed away; in the pyramidal tombs of Egypt; in the great Cyclopean earthworks and mounds; in the grassy hillocks, where the ashes of nameless heroes, uncelebrated by poets, and unrecorded by historians, have become inextricably one with common dust; in the monumental vestiges of language, so full of traces of an anterior time and state of human existence;—in all these we have testimony that, before history began, religion existed; that it is coeval with man upon the globe; that the religious ideas and human nature, as they advance together, arose together.

But the philosophy of human diversity is still a desideratum. Philosophers of the mind have been so intent on what is common to all mankind, that they have omitted to subject to their researches, to their critical analysis, to their delineation, the peculiarities which are so abundant. For, though all men have much in common, every man also has his idiosyncrasy. Whether we take the organs into which the head is mapped out by the phrenologist, or the list of human faculties which the Hartleian enumerates, and which he resolves into the principle of association,—on whichever theory of human faculties we proceed, when we think of their number, and of the changes that may be rung upon them, the countless combinations of which they are capable, what masses of figures would be required for their expression! Suppose man to have but thirty faculties or tendencies, in the changes of which these are susceptible, even without going minutely into differences of degree in each faculty, what an amazing variety of human character presents itself to our view,—not human character formed by circumstances, not the result of training, but human character as immediately affected by original tendency! And even this is far below the truth. It is not within the thirty organs—or whatever the exact number may be—that the faculties of the human mind are confined. Faculty is infinite; faculty is facility,—the facility which the mind acquires from its operation in any particular direction; and to this who can set limits, or who can count its numbers, even though he had numbered the sands of the sea-shore? The materials of human character may be simple, but they are not few; and their combinations would lead to a number as great as that of the individuals who constitute the human race, and who have constituted it from age to age. Nor is there ever any complete or exact reproduction; every one that lives, has lived, or will live, has some peculiarity which belongs, not to his circumstances, but to his being. Take twins: give them to the same nurse; send them to the same schoolmaster; apprentice them to the same occupation; place them as nearly as you can in the same circumstances; and is any one so ignorant of human nature as not to predict that, in spite of all this, there will be diversity of character? Why, even the Siamese twins, bound together by a physical bond, had their differences,—their intellectual and moral differences,—by which the one could have been discriminated from the other, in the lack of any other means. Mankind are not more varied in features; though rarely does it happen that the fiction of the novelist—of brothers so alike as to be taken one for the other by those who are familiar with both—has any chance of being realised. Mankind are as various in mind as in feature. That very able and excellent writer, Mrs. Somerville, in her recent work on the Physical Geography of the Globe, shows, in her concluding sentence, the point at which the physical consideration of the world comes into contact with the moral, and thus ends with a delineation of how the world's materials diverge:

"The individuality of man," she says, "modifies his opinions and belief. It is a part of that variety which is a universal law of nature; so that there will, probably, always be difference of views as to religious doctrine, which, however, will become more spiritual, and freer from the taint of human infirmity; but the power of the Christian religion will appear in purer conduct, and in the more general practice of mutual forbearance, charity, and love."

Individual difference, therefore, exercising its power over the forms of religion,—this is the final result of a contemplation even of the physical world. The varieties of human nature belong as much to the supremacy of human nature over other animals, as do the common attributes and properties of our being.

The idiosyncrasy thus determined overrides forms and dogmas. Take a man with what phrenologists would call the organ of destructiveness largely developed,—or with the tendency which they so describe,—and make him the professor of a religion of love and charity. Let his creed be, that when his right cheek is smitten, he shall turn the left; and that when his cloak is taken away, he shall give his coat also;—yet that man in some cases will fight for his religion, or, in others, will contend for it so vigorously and earnestly, as to show thereby the tendency of mental destructiveness. In the same way, take a man of an opposite tendency or temperament, a benevolent man, and give him the darkest and sternest creed: he will find, or he will make, some loop-hole in his prison-walls through which the light of heaven may shine. While he repeats creeds which consign to perdition, by millions, the rest of his fellow-creatures, he has a good-natured reservation for all his own relations, friends, and acquaintance, at the least. He will modify, in some way or other, and by some contrivance or other, the horrors of his faith, however authenticated. Temperament triumphs over creed. Mahometanism has had its ascetics in morals, and Christianity its epicureans in practice. Paul the persecutor and Paul the apostle were not so much two different moral beings as their appellations might intimate; no, not though the same person described himself, in one instance, as "the chief of sinners;" and in the other, as "not a whit behind the very chiefest of the apostles." He was the same man, always trying to "do God service." He strove for that when he haled men, women, and children to prison for their impiety, blasphemy, and obstinacy in the profession of Christianity, by which he feared the Deity might be provoked, and his religion and his country injured. When he was converted, as it is called, look at the man,—he is pretty much the same then. He quarrels with the benevolent Barnabas; he withstands Peter at Antioch to his face; and afterwards deliberately writes that the elder of the apostles was to be blamed. He travels round the world in the regal state of a spiritual sovereign, appointing and ordaining elders and bishops in every city, and giving them rules for their observance. There is not a place of renown but he will visit it,—especially the capitals that rule the world; he will go to Jerusalem, though at the hazard of his life; and after that he says: "I must see Rome also." And then he writes to rebuke or exclude this or that person for his obstinacy. He will come amongst them sternly; he utters his awful "anathema maranatha;" and he delivers over the offenders to Satan, "that they may learn not to blaspheme." In all this there is the same individual tendency,—it is the same character that speaks and acts through all.

The power of that tendency which I referred to in the instance of a benevolent person with a gloomy creed, is found in that soothing of the conscience which is exerted in behalf of a favourite character. For instance: a worthy and most excellent man, still living, and living to adorn the Calvinistic creed—Dr. Pye Smith—could not bring his mind, some years ago, to join in the opinion entertained by so many of his brethren, that Dr. Priestley had gone to eternal torments; and yet he was indulging heretical notions a few minutes before his dissolution. Dr. Smith observed, that several minutes of silence elapsed after that; and who can tell whether, in that brief interval, a divine change might not be wrought in the heart? Such are the fictions to which the benevolent mind has recourse, when it finds itself in contact with the gloomy influences of a damnatory creed.

We might illustrate this modifying influence of individual tendencies by the literature of a country, wherever it comes in contact with religion. If we could but take any twelve well-educated men—all bred up in one faith, all practising one worship, all members of one Church—and get them, without reference at all to the words of their formularies, to write out their notions of Christianity, we should get twelve varying representations of Christianity. Go into a gallery of old paintings: there is a conventional likeness of Christ, and therefore that is not in point: but take all the paintings which such a gallery will furnish of the Virgin Mary. Are they alike? In the queenly dignity of one,—in the shrinking, child-like simplicity of another,—in the deep pathos of this,—in the calm contemplation of that,—you see the reflection of the minds of the individual artists; you see the different conceptions which difference of character leads them to form of the object which they thus by their art render visible to the eye. There is the same diversity in music. Give a Tallis and a Purcell the same words of Scripture or of the liturgy; they will not express them by the same note. The stately march of one, and the lyrical energy of the other, will show themselves in the production of what, in fact, are different versions of a religious sentiment. That favourite theme of Catholic musicians, the "Benedictus,"—what a different thing it is, according to the different treatment they give it! With some, the low, harmonised, modulated tones of subterranean thunder—the deep voice of nature responding to the adorations of humanity; with others, the triumphal march of a victorious sovereign, coming like a king into the camp, to command the world; with others, again, the slow and solemn, the funereal, the warning, the consolatory step is heard, that goes to the bed of the sick man, and announces to him the coming of Christ, the Saviour, as the Angel both of death and of redemption. They have all, according to their tendencies, given a different tone to religion, as others have thrown a different colouring upon it; and such different tones and colourings the human mind will always give, according to its own specific tendencies.

The assignment of any specific results, in religious history or doctrine, to this cause, is difficult, or, I might rather say, impossible. We cannot separate its working from that of other causes; at least, we can do so in comparatively few instances. How soon it is overlaid by other powers!—the teachings of the nurse, and those of the priest,—the power of the family, and then the power of society;—but, intermingled with all, and amongst all, we may be sure that it exists.

It is only of late that this natural tendency to diversity of human nature has been fully recognised by philosophers. It is now recognised and established. And if these differences be such that for different children a varied mode of treatment is required even in their earliest education,—if there are propensities which mark out one for one species of occupation, and another for a very different species of occupation,—if there are seeds in infancy which grow and germinate through life, and require their peculiar training, —if some exercise powers and wield an influence of which others, however favoured by station, are altogether incapable,—why, then, we may assume that in religion, too, as in all things else, this diversity has its place, its operation, its results, and its advantages. Those who, in spite of this, strive to enforce an absolute uniformity of profession and of worship, strive against nature. They wage a vain conflict with Providence; they can, at the most, only pervert intellect, suppress truth, and promote hypocrisy. Variety in religion, as in all things else, is the dictate of nature. The different races of men who have been distributed into the Caucasian, the Mongolian, the American, the Malay, and the Ethiopian, have their peculiar seats and places in the world. We have coloured maps designating such habitations. Making allowances for conquest and colonisation, you may also colour maps according to the seat of religions, and you will find it may be done with as much facility as is afforded in the assignment of different races to their several localities. Even when their religion is nominally the same, it is not the same really. What a strange farrago is Ethiopian Christianity! In Europe, who does not perceive the tendencies of the genuine Saxon breed to the Protestant form of Christianity, and of the Celtic to the Catholic? This is not to be marked every where, indeed, with absolute universality and unerring accuracy. There may be cases, as in Wales, where the tendencies which, in one instance, would have made a Roman Catholic, in the other, make a Methodist,—the form of religion which perhaps, in spirit, approaches more nearly to the Catholic than any other form of Protestantism. But still, there is this broad, general division; and this is but a symptom of what takes place individually, and through all the diversities of nature. Each has its ideal; the type of excellence is not the same for all; it exists for each to strive towards, according to its peculiar nature, and in that peculiar course which is open to it. And even the superstition which peoples the region above the clouds with winged beings, appears to have had some perception of this; and in the angelic hierarchy there are the Cherubim who know, and the Seraphim who love. Our different human tendencies may have their end in attainments and enjoyments not to be realised here, but belonging to our immortal as well as to our mortal course. Each advancing towards its ultimate perfection, the oneness of the whole will be best illustrated by the diversity of the parts of which that whole is composed. The unity of all is in the Divine Spirit by which all are pervaded. And in advancing towards that,—whatever the especial type of excellence or perfection that may be indicated by original and natural variety,—each will rise above the imperfections and the grossnesses which, in this infantile state of things, obscure and lower our perceptions of the true, the beautiful, the good, and the blessed.

LECTURE III.

THE INFLUENCE OF NATURE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RELIGIOUS IDEAS.

April 1*st*, 1849.

THE contemplation of nature, considered as an agency or influence in the development of the religious ideas, may be technically classified into four modes or phases. As relates to this influence, nature may be contemplated sensuously, mythically, sentimentally, or scientifically. Sensuously, by the presentation of natural phenomena to our sight and hearing; mythically, by the association of such phenomena with the action or history of certain spiritual beings, real or supposed; sentimentally, by that influence which, in certain states of nature and of man, flows into us from surrounding objects, affecting the state both of body and of mind, of imagination and of reason; and scientifically, by the classification of phenomena and the progressive ascertainment of law.

This influence of nature on the development of the religious ideas of man is unavoidably a mixed influence, evil as well as good, though the good largely preponderates. There are reasons why it must be so. Nature does not speak to unsophisticated man. Her appeal is to the human being, perhaps, with hereditary tendencies and infirmities about him which cause him to misunderstand her voice. Or the nurse, the parent, or the priest has been beforehand with nature, and has instilled thoughts which give their colouring to other thoughts, spreading shades of error over the brightest hues of truth.

Mankind are trained up in what profess to be divine teachings, so as to bar their minds against some influences, and to misguide other influences, putting them into a wrong direction; and thus that which, after all deductions, is really the most powerful check upon error and superstition, will yet be frequently found to minister to both. Nature may speak, but the result must be dependent on man's capacity to hear. How much of the history of mankind, of the whole human race, and especially in religion, is analogous to that of the child who, in his first year, is, as Paley phrases it, "learning to see." The human species was long in learning to perceive the proper forms of the great thoughts that spring within them, the growth of their own being. We must not, therefore, be surprised at the different connections of the influence of natural objects with what have come to be generally regarded as superstitions in religion; and we may perhaps find that, even in these cases, it has ministered to the progress of truth by an agency which was necessary till the human powers were more completely matured, and human knowledge more widely enlarged. Let us endeavour to ascertain what it is. That is the question: what is it that man hears or may hear in the song of the stars, in the gracious march of the seasons, in the murmuring of waters, in the rushing of the winds? What is it which, when the earthquake and tempests subside, is whispered to him by "the still, small voice" that speaks in his own heart, as in a shrine, the oracles of nature?

The first mode or phase of this influence, I said, is the directly sensuous one. Man begins by seeing or hearing his God. There is the impulse in his nature towards the recognition of the divine; but he looks about for the divine, and expects to find it in something that presents itself to his senses. Hence that early and that prevailing practice of adoration of the sun as a deity; for the grandest and most imposing objects of sight so present themselves to the senses of humanity. In the rudest times they felt the sun's genial warmth; they discerned his power in their own sensations, and in the changing face of the earth and the waters around them. He was too glorious not to be a power. They said: "Is not this the Divine after whom we are seeking?" They ascended mountain-tops to watch his rising, and render to him their earliest adorations. They mourned his sinking; they deplored the eclipse of his beams; and our great circumnavigator, Captain Cook, made himself all but honoured as a deity by the savages to whom he had foretold an eclipse of that luminary. Men thus seemed to see their God, moving on in his majestic course, and dispensing his bounties; but their minds made continual progress in relation to him. The sun of himself became the golden chariot in which the Deity performed his course; and they saw him, with his pale, pure sister of the night, each of them with darts that carried death as well as blessings when they were aimed at mortals. They worshiped Apollo, "the far darting." The sensuous influence of nature became an imaginative, a pictorial, a mythical one. They traced the sun through the signs of the zodiac; these became the endurances or achievements of the god or hero, the adventures of Osiris, the labours of Hercules. And then science came, and expounded the position of the sun, and its influences, and something of its nature; and monotheism directed their thoughts to a Creator of suns and of worlds; and the same object which, regarded sensuously, had generated a kind of idolatry on the face of the earth, thus became linked with pure religion, and the sun glorified his Maker.

The effect of this species of influence on the mythology of the Greeks, in its earliest forms, is described by Sir Lytton Bulwer—or, as we must now say, Sir Bulwer Lytton—in his work on Athens.

"The mythology of the early Greeks," he says, "may perhaps be derived from the following principal sources: First, the worship of natural objects;—and of divinities so formed, the most unequivocally national will obviously be those most associated with their mode of life and the influences of their climate. When the savage first intrusts the seed to the bosom of the earth,—when, through a strange and unaccountable process, he beholds what he buried in one season spring forth the harvest of the next,—the Earth itself—the mysterious garner, the benign, but sometimes the capricious, reproducer of the treasures committed to its charge—becomes the object of the wonder, the hope, and the fear which are the natural origin of adoration and prayer. Again, when he discovers the influence of the heaven upon the growth of his labour—when, taught by experience, he acknowledges its power to blast or to mellow—then, by the same process of ideas, the Heaven also assumes the character of divinity, and becomes a new agent, whose wrath is to be propitiated, whose favour is to be won. What common sense thus suggests to us, our researches confirm; and we find accordingly that the Earth and the Heaven are the earliest deities of the agricultural Pelasgi. As the Nile to the fields of the Egyptian, so were Earth and Heaven to the culture of the Greek. The effects of the SUN upon human labour and human enjoyment are so sensible to the simplest understanding, that we cannot wonder to find that glorious luminary among the most popular deities of ancient nations. Why search through the East to account for its worship in Greece? More easy to suppose that the inhabitants of a land whom the sun so specially favoured, saw and blessed it, for it was good, than, amidst innumerable contradictions and extravagant assumptions, to decide upon that remoter shore whence was transplanted a deity whose effects were so benignant, whose worship so natural to the Greeks. And in the more plain belief we are also borne out by the more sound inductions of learning. For it is noticeable that neither the moon nor the stars—favourite divinities with those who enjoyed the serene nights or inhabited the broad plains of the East—were, though probably admitted among the Pelasgic deities, honoured with that intense and reverent worship which attended them in Asia and in Egypt. To the Pelasgi, not yet arrived at the intellectual stage of philosophical contemplation, the most sensible objects of influence would be the most earnestly adored. What the stars were to the East, their own beautiful Aurora, awaking them to the delight of their genial and temperate climate, was to the early Greeks."

Not only do direct objects of sense, real external objects, thus present an agency for stimulating the thought of Deity within the human mind, however erring in its identification of the Deity with such external objects, but there are also perceptions and sensations which, if their claim to be regarded as literal sensuous perceptions is very questionable indeed, yet have, no doubt, had their influence in kindling up and keeping alive in man a perception, so to speak, of the invisible. There are states of the mind and body, in which objects present themselves to either sight or hearing, having all the seeming reality, whatever their cause, of actual, external presentation. There is a case of this kind recorded in the poem of Job, and which we may take as a kind of secondary sensuousness, in the history of the influence of natural phenomena on religious thought. I allude to the celebrated description of the nightly visitation of Eliphaz:

> "A matter was imparted to me secretly;
> It came to my ear like a muttering sound.
> In the terrifying hour of night visions,
> At the time when deep sleep falleth upon men,
> A fear came upon me, and a horror,
> A shuddering went through all my bones;
> Then a spirit glided before me;
> The hair of my flesh stood on end.
> It stood still—but I could not distinguish its form.
> A spectre stood before mine eyes.—
> There was stillness—so that I heard a hollow murmur saying:
> 'Shall mortal man be just before God?
> Shall a man be pure in the sight of his Maker?
> Behold, He cannot confide in those who serve Him;
> Even his angels He chargeth with defection.
> What then are the dwellers in tenements of clay,
> Whose foundations are in the dust?
> They are crushed before the moth,
> They are destroyed from morning to evening;
> They are for ever perishing unnoticed;
> Their fluttering round is soon over;
> They die, quite destitute of wisdom.'"
>
> *Wemyss's Translation.*

Impressions probably very analogous to those which have been experienced in the mesmeric state, and having this conformity with such sensations, that they seem to loosen the best and truest thoughts of the mind, and give verbal expression to them, unrestrained by the ordinary conventionalisms of society. Sensations such as these have their effect from age to age, in ministering to the conviction that there are realities existing, though invisible to us—influences, powers, and truths—which claim their recognition almost, if not quite, on the same ground as that of the external objects of nature, continuously presenting themselves before us.

A second mode of influence in nature over the developments of the religious ideas is what I have called the mythical, which goes this step beyond the mere sensuous, that it begins to reason. It aims at finding a solution for a certain phenomenon, and gets at that solution by the supposition of the interference of some hero, demigod, or deity. It seeks for a cause. The mythical differs from the sensuous in this, that it is the combination of logic with observation and with legend. It sees some extraordinary phenomenon, some huge rock, perhaps, at a distance from any other of a similar formation, and believes that some divine hand threw it there. It rests in that as the solution of the problem. Our mode is to look out for the operation of physical causes; but it is only after the lapse of thousands of years that mankind have applied themselves to this resource. Their first idea was that of some agent, by whom whatever they could not otherwise account for had been achieved. Was the olive growing richly in their fields?—it was the gift of that goddess who presided over their town and its adjacent land. Had an earthquake riven asunder rocks that once were continuous?—it was Neptune enraged, who had smitten the earth with his trident. Very much indeed of the earlier part of the Jewish history is in this sense mythical; it describes the objects of nature and natural phenomena with reference to some real or supposed agency in their production. When the Jews escape from Egypt, it is Jehovah who delivers them. In their march across the bed of the sea, when a strong wind had laid it bare, it was the Lord that divided the waters. Did a tempest accompany the solemn enunciation of their law?—it was the trumpet of the Archangel, it was the announcement of the Divine presence, it was the voice of God. What is the account of the creation but a mythos of this kind? Pretensions to literal history it can have none. Its conformity with science is very imperfect and fluctuating; and in some points it is in direct contradiction with ascertained facts and the laws of science. But men saw the earth and the heavens around them, and asked, "How came they?" Oh, there was a hand that stretched abroad that bright blue canopy, a hand that laid those solid foundations on which the earth rests, and that poured abroad the ocean. And thus arose that magnificent succession of the six days' work, to which, when viewed as scientific or theological truth, it is scarcely creditable to a child to give its credence,—yet which, regarded as a mythos, stands before us one of the most beautiful monuments of the power of the human mind, in the exercise of its imagination on one of the loftiest of objects. Of a similar character is that legend of the rainbow covenant. Here, again, literal construction is a gross absurdity. If there was rain before the deluge, there must have been a rainbow before the deluge; and in countries where rain falls not, the rainbow comes not. Yet, again, how much beauty there is in accounting for the existence of such an object by supposing that, after some fearful catastrophe by water, he who sits above the clouds fixed his bow in the clouds as a pledge and a token to his creatures that he would not again destroy the earth. Thus they accounted for it; and this was to them more acceptable than any such reasoning as that which, in a later age, analysed the rainbow, and accounted for all its variety of colours, but which to them would have been utterly unintelligible. The beauty of their legend rests uninjured by the discovery of our philosophy; still the picture presents itself, in the language of our modern poets, as in their ancient poets, as one of the most beautiful groupings of ideas that earth has witnessed, or the mind of man has enshrined in his memorials. One of our own poets, not long since dead, thus apostrophises the rainbow:

"When o'er the new, undeluged earth
Heaven's covenant then did shine,
How came the world's gray fathers forth
To watch the sacred sign!

And as thy yellow lustre smiled
O'er mountains yet untrod,
Each mother held aloft her child
To bless the bow of God."

The science that analyses its beauty teaches the presence of Divinity and the pledge of Divine graciousness far more emphatically; but sense and picture forestalled the discoveries of science, and taught like truths before science beamed upon the earth. They saw, from generation to generation, the hand of God still renewing that pledge, still planting that bow in the clouds, as the symbol and assurance that, while the earth stands, day and night, summer and winter, seed-time and harvest, shall not cease. And what is that conviction but an anticipation, a feeling of the same kind as that which now gives us our undoubting reliance upon the laws of nature, our certainty that the causes which operated yesterday will operate to-morrow,—that those which were at work thousands of years ago will continue unchanged their operations thousands of years hence,—and that there is, in the regularity and certainty of these laws, the encouragement of human effect, and the best security for the recompense of human energy and perseverance?

Then there is the sentimental contemplation of nature. This is felt when man expects neither to see the Divine, nor to hear his voice,—nor is engaged in endeavouring to account for phenomena, and to find in legend or imaginative suggestion the solution of any natural difficulty which offers itself to his contemplation,—but where he simply gives himself up to nature, and allows it to exercise unrestrained its own benign influences upon him, whatever they may be,—when

> "He holds each bodily sense a holy thing,
> Communicating measurably to all
> The influences of that eternal Spirit
> Whose countenance to man is daylight hues,
> And skies, and seas, and forests, lakes, and hills,
> And mountains, thunder, and prodigious storms,
> And suns, and all the company of worlds."

It is in thus giving himself up to these influences that the poet—like Gray, when he produced those verses which have appealed, and ever will appeal, to all hearts, even in their homeliness and commonplace character—would "pore upon the brook that murmured by." It is this disposition which finds "sermons in stones, and good in every thing." It is this which springs with the dawn of morning, and this which fills the closing in of day, when evening sheds quiet over all, with love to man and love to God. It is this which, in the starry night, feels both the depressing and the elevating influence of the gorgeous scene, and which exclaims: "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained, what is man, that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" It was this loveliness and yielding to the influences of nature that made the Greeks, in their beautiful sunsets,

> "Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea,
> Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn."

It is this which has stimulated the fancy of men, in their pictures of the blessedness of another state of existence. This generated the conception of those Elysian Fields, so full of beauty and of grace, where pure spirits were in ancient times supposed to hold delighted converse with each other.

This has had its effect on Christian poets, in suggesting such imagery as that of Dr. Watts:

"There shall I bathe my weary soul
In seas of heavenly rest,
And not a wave of trouble roll
Across my peaceful breast."

This conception of peace reared the colleges and monasteries of the Essenes, and of the monks and hermits of a later time, who found in the intense quiet of nature that "peace passing understanding" which they could not obtain amid the turmoil of the world. This is a sensation, the naturalness and the religious character of which have made themselves appreciated and expressed by one of the stormiest minds that our country has produced—which led Lord Byron, the poet of passion and of energy, thus to realise the spiritual influences of the quiet night:

"All heaven and earth are still—though not in sleep,
But breathless, as we grow when feeling most;
And silent, as we stand in thoughts too deep;—
All heaven and earth are still. From the high host
Of stars to the lull'd lake and mountain-coast,
All is concentred in a life intense,
Where not a beam, nor air, nor leaf is lost,
But hath a part of being, and a sense
Of that which is of all Creator and Defence.

Then stirs the feeling infinite, so felt
In solitude, where we are *least* alone;
A truth which through our being then doth melt,
And purifies from self: it is a tone,
The soul and source of music, which makes known
Eternal harmony, and sheds a charm
Like to the fabled Cytherea's zone,
Binding all things with beauty,—'twould disarm
The spectre Death, had he substantial power to harm.

Not vainly did the early Persian make
His altar the high places and the peak
Of earth-o'ergazing mountains, and thus take
A fit and unwall'd temple, there to seek
The Spirit in whose honour shrines are weak,
Uprear'd of human hands. Come, and compare
Columns and idol-dwellings, Goth or Greek,
With nature's realms of worship, earth and air,
Nor fix on fond abodes to circumscribe thy prayer!"

After all this—after, in the order of nature—after, in the order of time—comes science to analyse the phenomena which have been working in so many different ways upon previous generations. Science comes to correct, but not to supersede. It comes to correct the errors of a sensuous contemplation of nature, and to prove to man that he cannot see his God, and that a God he would not be if he were visible. It comes to correct the mythical, to expose the want of connection between such alleged causes and the results which they are introduced to account for, and to explain, by a more distinct and connected chain of cause and effect, how they really happened. It comes to correct sentiment from those adumbrations which established creeds, or individual peculiarities, or passionate influences, may superinduce upon it, making it, like stained glass, to colour all things with its own hues. It comes to make sensuousness more accurate, to make mythos take its proper position as poetical, and to give to sentiment its largest expansion, by associating ideas of number, space, power, majesty, duration, which in no other way can be perceived and appreciated. But, as science advances, down go the superstitions which, by these errors and aberrations, have been nourished or strengthened in the world. Science is, in one sense, the great destroyer; for there is an organ of destructiveness in the human brain. According to the Hindoo theology, Sieva, the destroyer, is a person as divine as Bramah, the creator; and science, in its destructions, is really the great reproducer of the true and the good. It tells man to trace Divinity in beneficent and unchanging law. If it sweeps away his legends, considered as literal history, it gives more of beauty to their imaginative worth and power. It tells us not to look for a miracle to be wrought to feed some men with quails, and others with loaves and fishes; but it shows us that regular continuous action of the divine law by which the seed yields the harvest in succession unbroken from the creation of the world. If it forbid man to see his god in the sun, or to listen for oracles from the stars, it shows him sun and stars rejoicing together in those harmonious movements which impress us with a conception of wisdom, power, and majesty in no other way to be obtained by the human mind.

And thus science carries on the work which, through sensuousness, and a mythical interpretation of nature, and a sentimental giving up of mind and body to its influences, has still gone on developing, though often erroneously, the religious ideas in humanity. The operation is a gradual one, and so it should be regarded. The error comes, in process of time, to be considered and exposed; it drops off and withers; while the truth abides, roots itself in the heart, and expands itself. We should look on the wondrous process as a whole, and not, by fixing on particular operations, rob them of their meaning and their character as parts of the entire process. They have all their importance in connection with the rest; they should be regarded lovingly, and not with feelings of disapprobation. Nor is it wonderful that we find them intermingled, contemporaneous in the same generation. There will still be those—and long must it be so—who belong to the ages that have gone by, in the general history of the development of the human mind upon religious matters,—who have yet their sensuousness as to divine things,—who require what they deem the preternatural to be seen and heard. There will still be those whose religion is mere legend, or mere unguided sentiment. There will still be the various steps and chains of the progress presenting themselves at once; as we may trace in a large empire all the grades through which civilisation has passed in order to bring the world to its present position. Let us not think this strange, nor repine too much at its results,—at the misunderstanding which it supposes of the wisest teaching,—at the persecutions to which it subjects those who are in advance of their time and country,—at the long periods which must elapse before even simple truths are cleared from the associations that have gathered around them, before even the elementary truths of religion and morals, coenduring with the human race, are yet acknowledged as they should be in their simplicity and in their proportions. But the time will come. As the plan proceeds, the earth rolls on in its course. Winter may prolong its rain,—may chill the first buddings of the spring,—keep the bare branches without their promised foliage,—cover the grain as if it were buried in a grave from which there is no resurrection,—the earth may have prolonged upon its surface all its wintry horrors;—but yet, as Galileo said when emancipated from the dungeon of the Inquisition, in which he had been immured for his alleged heresy in denying that the earth was fixed in the centre of the planetary system,—"yet it moves." And as it moves onward, it comes into brighter paths; more genial influences are encountered; its surface becomes rich with flowers and fruits; and all is light, and warmth, and life, and gladness, and rejoicing.

Time has been when the words of the wise were thrown back perhaps with hatred and persecution; when those who would raise mankind, endeavouring perhaps to raise them prematurely, became the victims of their own good, and had to complete their munificence by unmerited sufferings,—when, instead of the blessed change to which they were aspiring, they only saw the world dark, rude, and sterile; but "still it moves." Truth gradually spreads; the light brightens and brightens, like the advancing beams of spring and summer; and those who would have put prophets and sages to death, build their monuments, and worship at their shrines, and consecrate their memories; their lessons prevail over the earth, they become the consolation of the old, and are studied by the child as its hornbook. That men should think that Deity was something to be seen, that they should worship earth and the sun, that they should frame to themselves strange fictions of divine heroes, that they should deprecate the wrath of heaven by sacrifices, costly, perhaps, or bloody,—this must be, and that superstition should brood over the face of the world for a long and a dark night; but "still it moves."

A God unseen is recognised and worshiped; wonders give place to thought and to reason; a spirit of love diffuses itself; and men unite with each other as brethren, and rejoice in the universal Father. And thus will other errors and superstitions,—or rather, to speak more correctly, other temporary forms and phenomena of one single, continuous, and benignant purpose,—thus will they pass away; thus will they gradually free the earth from what seems to have clung to it and withered it like a curse; thus will that same world, in the due order of things, present to us brighter scenes and happier inhabitants; for "still it moves."

LECTURE IV.

THE INFLUENCE OF NATURE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RELIGIOUS IDEAS (*continued*).

May 6th, 1849.

I MUST recall to the recollection of those who were here the last time I lectured, that the subject on which I then treated was,—the agency of nature as a modifying influence over the development of the religious ideas in humanity. What those ideas are—their universality, their objective reality—had been discussed in a previous course; and I commenced these lectures by enumerating the various causes which affect them, as they are progressively manifested in the different religions which have prevailed with the human race. The last lecture was on the power of nature, on the contemplation of nature in that connection; and that contemplation was characterised as referable to four distinct phases. Nature, as viewed in connection with the development of the religious ideas, it was then said, might be regarded either sensuously, mythically, sentimentally, or scientifically. Sensuously, as with

> "The poor Indian, whose untutored mind
> Sees God in clouds, or hears him in the wind;"

mythically, when man endeavours, as did the Jews of old, to account for the rainbow in the clouds, not by natural causes, but by the legend that a vindictive Deity had drowned the earth, and that it was a pledge against the recurrence of any such catastrophe,—a pledge granted to human sense by a Divine hand stretching out its bow in the clouds; sentimentally, when man, without endeavouring to make nature the subject of analysis or of reasoning, gives himself up to its influences,—opens, as it were, all the pores of his mind to the reception of its benignant agency,—becomes at one with the sights on which he gazes, and the sounds to which he listens,—and, under the impression thus made, contemplates God, Providence, or his own destiny;

and scientifically, when, submitting to human researches, external, material truth rises upon the mind with a majesty superior to that which imagination had ever given to its brightest visions, and pours upon us those sensations of infinity and eternity which raise our thoughts to the highest point of contemplation.

But the subject of the influence of nature as a modifying power on the development of the religious ideas was by no means exhausted in this classification; for we may look at it historically as well as analytically. We may consider the course which it has actually taken, the influence which it has actually exercised over human thought, as well as the diverse modes in which that thought is directed to its contemplation. And this is what I propose to do now. For though nature, with its phenomena, may modify the religious ideas, it does not originate them; they originate in ourselves, in our own mental and moral constitution; they are the growth of human thought, and not of material phenomena. The profoundest oracles, the greatest revelations, if they are made to us, are also made in us. The heart is God's holiest temple; and it is the thought within us that gives its full meaning, and that invests with their due degree of influence the external phenomena of nature. There is a religion of the elements; but it is when man is struggling to conceive of the vast, the unbounded, the enduring,—it is then that the heavens are the loftiest, and that the ocean is the broadest; it is then that every magnificent object in nature assumes a higher degree of magnificence, and thus reacts upon his thoughts, keeping them pure and elevated. There is a religion of high places; men have always worshiped on high places. There they have kindled their sacred fires through succeeding centuries, and have raised the abodes of their gods on the tops of mountains. But it is the internal aspiration, the desire to be somewhat nearer to the gods; it is the loftiness of thought, the desire of holding communion, nearer communion, with the stars, or of looking down on a wide expanse of country below,—it is this which gives a greater power, and constitutes a more vital efficacy, in the religion of high places, than mere material elevation ever could impart. There is a religion of caverns, of forests; they impress with awe, they excite by loveliness; they have been peopled, in different mythologies, with beings the most beautiful and graceful, or the most fearful and awful. Oracles have been heard from the depths of caverns; the mephitic vapours of such places have been the inspiration of the maddened priestess who gave forth her oracular verse. But still it is man's love of the dark as well as of the light, it is his perception of the awe-inspiring influence of such objects in their magnitude or in their profundity, that has given them strength to impart that peculiar character to religious thought which has always been associated with veneration for such places,—for the caverns, descending even to Hades, with its Elysian Fields, and Tartarus in the centre of the earth; or reverencing God under the shade of those mighty forests, which have been the source of religious thought and reverence in so many and such distant ages. There is a religion of streams and rivers; but it is humanity which has consecrated the Nile, the Ganges, or the Jordan. It is humanity which has watched their ever-flowing stream, and found it an unfailing source of thought. And whether the wanderer thirsts and refreshes himself at the little fountain whose streamlet flows unseen through the wilderness, or whether he stands in admiration on the borders of some broad and mighty stream,—still it is by his own investment that they become possessed of their divinity; and whilst they teach him, they have also received from him; they minister to the thought which is already in him; they do not reveal, but they give strength, colour, beauty, diversity, and endurance to the revelation which God makes in him as well as to him.

It is only, therefore, in this subordinate ministration that we can regard these agencies; but still it implies this much,—it implies the previous thought, it implies the religious ideas; just as, for their effect on the vegetable world, the powers of the atmosphere—the sunshine and the dews and the showers of heaven—imply vegetable life. Not all their richness, not all the gentleness with which the rain descends, bringing its nutriment to the thirsty earth, will make the stone grow, or cause it to assume new forms of beauty or of greatness. There must be the previous vitality, to receive this agency and to render it efficacious. And so it is with the religious ideas in human nature, and the ministrations thereto of the phenomena of nature.

In regarding the history of religious thought, the records which remain to us of the development of the religious ideas, to which I have so long and so largely directed your attention, we may arrange that history under four formulæ. The first will be expressed by the terms, "Nature is God," the last by the proposition, "God is nature;" which, I think, you will readily apprehend I do not use in the sense of an identical proposition, but as indicating that which is to be the measure of the other object in the proposition. Divinity, in the first instance, lowered to nature; the grandeur of Divinity, in the other, communicated to, or considered as existing in, nature. "Nature is God," is the first state; "God is nature," is the last;—and between these are two intermediate forms, not succeeding one another, but which existed contemporaneously, and which may be described by the phrases,—"God is over nature," "God is in nature." These two formulæ, I think, comprehend the history of that intermediate portion of religion which existed between the first form of theology in ancient Egypt, and the latest form which it assumes in philosophical Christianity.

"Nature is God," was the first form which religion assumed; and this is to be contemplated in the religion—so far as we can trace it—of ancient Egypt. In an admirable book—I mean Heeren's *History of Greece*—the difference between the gods of Egypt and of Greece is distinctly and both acutely and beautifully drawn. He marks the change which mythology underwent in Greece; he observes on the alleged fact of their having received their gods from other nations; and says:

"But if the popular religion of the Greeks was formed by changing the character of foreign gods, in what did the change consist? What were the characteristics of the Grecian assembly of divinities? This question is important, not for the history of the Grecian religion alone, but for the general history of religion itself. For the problem is nothing less than to fix on the essential difference between the ancient religion of the eastern and that of the western world.

"This characteristic difference may yet be easily discovered, and may be reduced, I think, to a single head.

"All inquiries relative to the divinities of the eastern nations, even though the explanations of individual ones may be various, lead to the general result, that they were elementary; that is, founded on the worship of some object or power of nature. There may have been first corporeal objects,—the sun, the moon, the stars, the earth, the river which watered the country; or there may have been powers of nature,—a creating, a preserving, a destroying power; or—which was more usual—both these may have been combined; and visible objects become objects of adoration, in so far as they were the expressions of a creating or destroying power. When the gods of the Egyptians, the Indians, the Persians, the Phrygians, the Phœnicians, and others, are analysed, even in cases where the interpretation remains imperfect, it cannot be doubted that some idea of this kind lay at the bottom, and was the predominant one. They had but one signification, as far as this idea was connected with it; and the sacred traditions and mythological tales respecting them seem to us without meaning, because we have so often lost the key to their interpretation. 'The Egyptians,' Herodotus informs us, 'had a sacred tradition, that Hercules once appeared before Ammon, and desired to see him face to face. Ammon refused, and Hercules persevered in his request; upon this Ammon slew a ram, veiled himself in its skin, put on its head, and in this plight showed himself to Hercules. From that time the Thebans ceased to sacrifice rams; only once a year, on the festival of Ammon, they kill a single one, hang its skin round the picture of the god, and show at the same time the picture of Hercules.' Who understands this story and this festival from the mere relation? But when we learn that the ram, opening the Egyptian year, is the symbol of the approaching spring, that Hercules is the sun of that season in its full power, the story, as well as the festival, is explained as descriptive of the spring, and as a figurative representation of the season then beginning. In this, as in similar cases, the object or power of nature was exhibited in a human shape; the tendency to copy our own form being deeply fixed in our nature. But in all such cases, in the East, where the human form was attributed to the gods, it was but a secondary affair, the indispensable means of presenting them to the senses. It was never any thing more. And that is the reason why those nations never hesitated to depart from this human form, and to disfigure it, whenever it seemed possible thereby to give a greater degree of distinctness to the symbolical representation, or if any other object could thus be more successfully accomplished. This is the source of all those singular shapes which the gods of the East generally assume. The Indian makes no scruple of giving his gods twenty arms; the Phrygian represents his Diana with as many breasts; the Egyptian gave them the heads of beasts. Different as these disfigurations are, they all have their origin in this: the human form was but a subordinate object; the chief aim was, a more distinct designation—more distinct in the view of the East—of the symbol.

"As the Greeks received most, if not all, of their gods from abroad, they of course received them as symbols of natural objects and powers; and the farther we look back in the Grecian theogony, the more clearly do their gods appear as such beings. He who reads with tolerable attention the early systems, as set forth in Hesiod, cannot mistake this for a moment; nor can it be denied that there are traces of it in the gods of Homer. That his Jupiter designates the pure ether, his Juno the atmosphere, his Apollo the sun, is obvious in many of his narrations. But it is equally obvious that this prevailing notion is not the ancient symbolical one, but that his Jupiter is already the ruler of gods and men, his Juno the queen of Olympus.

"This, then, is the essential peculiarity of the popular religion of the Greeks; they gradually dismissed the symbolical representations, and not only dismissed them, but adopted something more human and more sublime in their stead. The gods of the Greeks were *moral persons*."

The history of the year—the natural history of the year as it passed in Egypt—that is, the succession of natural phenomena there presented, and acting on the religious ideas, yet most imperfectly developed in the human mind, though existing there—is the description of Egyptian mythology. Their Osiris, the sun; their Isis, the moon; their seasons,—for in old Egypt they reckoned but three seasons of the year, and not four, as we do,—the origin of their Triad: whether it was Isis, Osiris, and Horus, as it sometimes appeared to be; or Osiris, "the former," Isis, "the preserver," and Typhon, "the destroyer," as in other cases it appeared to be,—these three Egyptian seasons were the source of the Egyptian divine triplicity in their supreme Deity; and in that they became the source of all those many trinities which prevailed to such an extent in the ancient eastern world, and which, by the power of association, by the modes of thought thus established and cherished, and with certain prototypes suggesting them in nature, forced their way into the religions of the west, and made good their standing in Christianity itself. Nor is this the only instance wherein modern forms and modes of expressing theological dogma were derived from the material creation, from the course of the seasons, and in some particulars even yet, perhaps, from the peculiarities of that course as connected with oriental countries, rather than occurring in our own. What are our principal saint-days? what the festivals of our apostles, and even of the Founder of our religion? They have all their relations to the signs of the zodiac, as well as the old Egyptian mythology. For instance, taking the four most prominent characters of the Christian system, —Christ, Mary his mother, the Baptist his precursor, and the chief of the angelic hierarchy, whom some identify with Christ in his preëxistent state,—these four, the cardinal points of the common Christian system, bear these relations: the feast of the Virgin Mary is on the day that the sun enters Aries; the feast of St. John the Baptist on the day the sun enters Cancer; that of the archangel Michael on the day the sun enters Libra; and that of Christ on the day the sun enters Capricorn;—the four cardinal points of the year thus corresponding with the four cardinal points of the theology. Then, after these, the secondary festivals are held as follows: the feast of the apostle Paul on the day the sun enters Aquarius; that of St. Matthew on the day the sun enters Pisces; that of St. Mark on his entrance into Taurus; that of Corpus Christi on his entrance into Gemini; that of St. James on his entrance into Leo; of St. Bartholomew on his entrance into Virgo; of St. Simon and St. Jude on his entrance into Scorpio. The days correspond precisely, allowing for the precession of the equinoxes. Here, then, we have the traces of nature in the outer forms in which religions have developed themselves,—indications of the power they exercise,—a power which, as I have before remarked, in consequence of the mode in which man contemplates nature, sometimes bears towards us an evil aspect, although, on the whole and predominantly, a benignant one.

The Egyptians were in the state that we ascribe to "the untutored Indian." They looked abroad for something in which to embody the thoughts that were within their minds. They saw power, sometimes beneficent, sometimes of a contrary character. They saw a power in Typhon, or the typhoon, the wind of the desert, which, issuing from its dreary habitations, driving along its artillery of sand, covers the land with barrenness, parches the earth till it sinks beneath the awful visitation, and lashes the waves of the sea into fury. They saw the progress of the sun through the different signs of the zodiac, those fantastic figures; and in this gradation, in this regular march, is the triumphal procession which they described of Osiris through all the regions of the earth,—songs of praise and gratulations hailing his advance—troops of fauns and satyrs and uncouth figures dancing before him in his way; and at last sinking in gloom into the huge chest in which the legend tells us Typhon immured him, until the glad season came of revival and renewed power. They marked the influence of that pale Isis, the sister of Osiris, deriving light from his light; the crescent on her brow; her cry striking with madness. To the Egyptian, the natural was preternatural. He made not our distinctions; he had arrived at none of our notions of law. He saw power; he felt its beneficence, he experienced injury: he looked no further; but these became to him the Divine; and so he worshiped all things. The world was to him one great, though varied, object of adoration, rolling on in what we should call its blind force. The power and the influence were enough for him. Humanity craved something to worship; nature was at hand, seeming to his confused sense to say: "Worship me;" and he bowed in adoration.

Such was the first form,—"Nature is God." But this could not continue. Though this might be the religion of the people, it was not the religion of those priests whose stores of accumulated knowledge were so vast; who, commanding the resources of despotic government, had ampler agencies than any scientific class has ever possessed since, perhaps, for diving into the secrets and mysteries of nature. They looked beyond this; and in their private speculations—the source of those mysteries which afterwards were celebrated in Greece and at Rome—they separated matter from spirit. And the arcana of the priests of Egypt were the popular revelation of Moses,—bred in their wisdom, and endeavouring to found a nation of priests, as he repeatedly called the Israelites,—of those who should be, as he had been, initiated, inducted into those higher modes of thought, of investigation, and of interpretation which had been peculiar to the speculative few. Men found that they had a certain degree of power over the elements; and that which they could command, they would not longer implicitly worship. Nature sank in their estimation, and Deity rose. The companionship, which was so indissoluble in Egypt, was stayed in its course. God and the world became distinct to the Jewish mind. The sun descended to be his servant and slave, rising and shining at his bidding; the winds became his messengers, and the lightning-flames his ministers. They lost their independence, their supposed divinity. The phenomena and the objects of contemplation in nature took a lower grade in human thought; but the spirit, the life, and the power which was then divorced from them was elevated to something higher. They were ruled—they had been made; and so man demurred longer to worship them. He looked to the power which did rule them, and which had made them. In his way—not the mode which we should call spiritual, but in a way which showed the struggling of the mind to get into another state of thought on such subjects—he raised above them the power to which he rendered homage; and from this chaos of the blind agencies and influences of nature,—of the divinity of the sun shining in his strength, or the blast of the desert raging in its fury,—from this chaos arose the Hebrew Jehovah, sitting enthroned above the clouds of heaven, stretching his line to lay the foundations of the earth, holding the ocean in the hollow of his hand, commanding all the elements, descending to reach even the summits of loftiest mountains, and causing hills and forests to tremble at his presence. Thus was God presented to human thought apart from nature,—making nature, ruling over nature. The second of the formulæ which I have described was realised in Judaism—"God above nature."

The same struggle is manifested in the modes of religion which succeeded in Greece to the first Egyptian religion. There was the same impatience of there not being something more than the mere material, more than mere matter, in Godhead. The Greeks, like the Jews, could not rest in this: their thoughts were too lofty and too pure; but the way which they took to solve the problem was a very different one from that which Moses and the Jews adopted. The Greeks did it in this way. Instead of a single individualisation of the spirit of life, power, and beauty, they had recourse to a numerous individualisation of that self-same spirit. They too, like the Jews, saw that something more was necessary; like them, they learned—or rather, they modified and changed—the ancient Egyptian instruction, but by this different course, that they looked at single objects rather than at the aggregate. They saw the river flowing in its bright and sparkling course, with all its beauty and benefits, with its continuity, ever bubbling fresh from its fountain, and wending its way towards the mighty ocean in which it is engulfed; and they said, "All this is something superhuman—something to be regarded with love, veneration, and admiration; but this water does not live, is not divine. What is there in it? There must be a spirit, a power. There is a river-god that still, from his unfailing urn, pours forth its stream—a deity who presides over it, guides, determines its course, who is watchful lest its waters dry up, who bestows upon men all the manifold blessings that flow from its unceasing progress." They looked at the waves of the sea rolling and raging; they could not regard them as mere reinless steeds or independent powers and principles in the world of existence, which they had already learned was a world not only of mere gross matter, but of thought and spirit also. They asked for and sought a reigning and ruling power, and forthwith Neptune rolled his mighty chariot and wielded his trident-sceptre; the god of the ocean and his brother parted between them the upper and nether regions—the air and heaven above, and the deep abysses in the centre of the earth. The very tree had for them a beauty which was too much for mere organisation, which to their thoughts required also vitality, a spirit, an indwelling power and principle, which they individualised in the hamadryad, whose habitation it was, and whose own loveliness was, as it were, imparted to the object, though under different forms—its leaves, flowers, and fruits. And thus they passed through all nature, every where individualising and giving forms to the spirit of life which they thought, and rightly thought, must inhere in these grand and beautiful objects, and which was necessary to enable them to account for the divinity they had already learned to be residing in them. This was the course they pursued, till form was idealised, till the grandest expression was given to their artistical conceptions, and their conceptions of the perfection of the human figure, or of the grandeur of divinity itself, were embodied in the Apollo and the Olympian Jove. Ill do those construe the mythology of Greece who rake up its foolish legends, who dwell on this or that absurd story of the loves or the wars of these deities; ill do they construe a great and noble effort of the human mind to explain a problem that had spread mystery and darkness over the land of Egypt, which the human mind had outgrown—which Moses was resolving in one way, whereby God was parted from nature—which they resolved in another way, still keeping up the identification of the natural and the divine.

And the modes of thought which philosophical Christianity tends toward may be called the synthesis of these—the result which naturally flows from the succession of the formulæ that nature is God, that God is above nature, that God is in nature, and which we endeavour to describe in the phrase that "God is nature." The separation, necessary for a time, that led the human mind from the first and lowest form—that nature is God,—to the last and highest form yet attained, if not the highest attainable—that God is nature,—that separation ceases, and we again contemplate God in his works. Not by a manifold individuality, but by a universal existence and emanation, is the divine, in the thoughts of such, identified with nature. God is worshiped every where; he

"Shines in the sun, refreshes in the breeze;
Glows in the stars, and blossoms in the trees;
Lives through all life, extends through all extent;
Spreads undivided, operates unspent."

What is it by which the earth rolls on in its course, and keeps faithfully its orbit? What is it by which the sun binds together the system of which he is the centre, and knows the hour of his rising and his going down? What is it by which worlds grow and fill their appropriate position, and run their destined rounds? What is this but God? What is it that lives,—lives in the blade of grass, lives in the branching oak,—is beautiful in the blossoming flowers,—manifests itself in those diversified forms and that ceaseless succession of vitality which we every where behold? What is this but God? What is it that not only lives in man, but thinks, feels, acts? What are the phenomena of mind? What are all moral developments, holding on in their course, from the first and comparatively low manifestations to those which have been attained, and those yet brighter and nobler which we trust will be attained? What are these but God?—God one with all, not by ruling merely, not by creating or forming, but he in them as they in him—one identically by emanation and effluence—the infinite evolving the finite. We thus arrive, as I said, at the completion of the scale. We worship a Deity who is not alien from that which we behold, which we see, feel, taste, touch, and handle. We are not allowed to speak scornfully of matter as opposed to spirit: they are both and alike divine; God is matter and spirit. The world is consecrated; every sod is holy ground, and every star shines with a divine and revealing lustre.

In this course,—in this progress, as I must esteem it, of human thought,—in these developments of the religious ideas in human nature,—if the phenomena of nature, guided by manifold and sundry influences, have not done all that we might desire, still, how much they have done, both in checking error and in stimulating thought, knowledge, truth, and piety! Their ministrations have been ever at hand. From their first agency in impressing the notion of the Divine upon the human, deepening and extending it, to their remonstrance, if we may so regard it, against ancient superstition,—the efforts made by the Jews in their way, or by the Greeks in theirs, to arrive at a more distinct conception of the Divine,—in all these we trace the impulse of natural objects, the effect of the contemplation of natural phenomena upon the mind. Their ministration to devout feeling I have already regarded. Their subservience to the principles of religious thought is plain, even when reference is made to that religion which so separated the Divine from the human—I mean the Jewish; for throughout that volume, when the legislator, the prophet, the teacher most rises to the sublime or most expatiates in the beautiful, it is to nature that he has recourse. Nor have sacred books ever been more abundant—no sacred books are so abundant—as the scriptures of the Old and New Testament in the use which they make of allusions to natural phenomena. And this influence is as essential as it is beneficent. Man cannot be wholly ignorant in spiritual and divine things, so long as "day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth forth knowledge." Man cannot be wholly thoughtless, careless, or indifferent, so long as there is, not merely in the words of the preacher, but in the objects themselves, an admonition to "consider the lilies of the field how they grow." Man cannot feel himself wholly deserted and abandoned, with no ground for trust or consolation, so long as "the blue sky bends over all." And as the "cherubim and seraphim" in Jewish mythology "continually do cry," so do the stars and the flowers, the clod of earth and the heart of man, respond to their cry, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come!"

LECTURE V.

The Influence of Art on the Development of the Religious Ideas.

May 20th, 1849.

The intervals at which these lectures are delivered entail the inconvenience of obliging me to remind those by whom they are attended, in almost every lecture, of the general subject to which they relate, and the progress already made. The general topic is, the causes and influences that modify the development in man of the religious ideas, which appear universally to spring from his moral constitution—in other words, an attempt at a history of the religious principle in human nature, as it has been exhibited in different ages, in different countries, and under different circumstances and influences. We have regarded those which the phenomena of nature exercise. In the last two lectures I attempted to depict the power which they have exerted from ancient to modern days, the effect on the senses, on the feelings, on the thoughts, by which they have given different shades of colouring and of character to the great, general, pervading conception of the religious ideas—that is, of God, of Providence, of duty, and of immortality. I now come to consider art as one of those modifying influences.

What is art? In the best sense of the word, the child of nature, the offspring of nature around us and of nature within us,—the result of their combination. The eye rests on the lofty mountains, on the wide-extended plain, on the depths of the cavern, on the darkness of the forest, on the broad ocean, on the remote stars; or it is caught by the diversities of colour in creation, by the shifting of shine and shade,—by those different hues, now so delicate, and now so broadly massed; or we notice symmetry in form, or listen to sounds which generally are music to the ear,—the song of birds, and the roaring of the waves. And while these external objects present themselves to the senses, there is within us a groping after the conceptions of grandeur, of beauty, of proportion, of musical harmony, which corresponds with these objects and with their action upon the senses, which claims affinity with them, and which aspires to imitate or to emulate them. The result so produced, in its actual operation, is what we call art, manifesting itself in the various devices of architecture, of sculpture, of painting, and of music. Not that in this there is mere copying; there is rather an attempt at new formation, resulting from the correspondence between the tendency towards these general conceptions of sublimity and loveliness in ourselves, and the objects on which that tendency feeds, which are presented to us in every portion of the material universe. We are, in effect, from the impulses of our own being, and from the suggestions and influences of nature, learning to create; and the creations of art may, in this point of view, be regarded as, in fact, natural creations. They are the result of the combination of our own imaginative conceptions, with the presentations to us of the objects of sense. Therefore, art is, as I said, the child of nature; it has been called so in reference to that skill with which the horticulturist produces improved fruits from comparatively worthless stocks; and the remark is a general one. "Nature is made better by no means, but nature makes those means; so that the art which you say adds to nature, is an art which nature makes. It is an art which does mend nature,—change it, rather; but the art itself is nature." And so is all true art.

Art is to the senses what the religious ideas are to the mind, heart, or soul. It is an idealisation, resulting from our tendency towards the great abstractions of grandeur and of beauty. Man has within him, and he finds cherished from without, the principle of vastness. He attempts to rear magnificent buildings; but the most splendid building is perhaps, after all, only an imperfect copy of the model previously reared in the mind of the architect; and even his imaginative conception is only an attempt to unfold, to develop, to render more distinct, the previous idea of sublimity in his mind And so it is with all the arts. In their greatest productions, they have had their mental prototypes, of which they are only the outshadowing. And so conscious are we of this, that it is the inevitable tendency of the mind to ascribe to the great Creator something of the same kind, —to suppose an archetype of the universe in the Divine mind, existing there in its absolute perfection, before it assumes that external and material existence in which it becomes obvious to us. In this case, therefore, there is a distinct analogy; these conceptions have their own relations to the religious ideas. They do that for the external and sensuous which the religious ideas do for the moral and the spiritual; and in the one case, as in the other, man is groping his way towards the outward configuration of that which exists within him as an idea native to his mind.

This being so, it may well be imagined that the first application of art, its first and noblest use, would be to the purposes of religious expression. And such is the fact historically. Men did not lavish art originally on their own homes, on their own property and possessions. It did not tend to individual aggrandisement; it had a higher aim. In their own dwellings they sought only the commonest objects of utility. They reared their tree-pillars, and threw their beams across, and made to themselves a shelter, thinking of nothing more. They daubed some substance or other with colour, in order to give a notion of some absent form or object, and with this they were content. The voice itself was used but for the purpose of calling attention, or endeavouring to convey some information. But when the internal disposition, stimulated by the external appearances and agencies of nature, arose within them to the conceptions of sublimity, of beauty, of proportion, of order, of melody, of harmony,—when man set to work as an artist,—we immediately find the religious principle claiming the exercise of his powers, and, for a long course of ages, claiming them exclusively, or only admitting the conception of country—as when the palaces of ancient kings aimed to represent the nations which they governed—into any thing like a subordinate partnership with its divine direction. Having conceived, and seen realised in nature, the notion of vastness, man raised his pyramids—those enduring and venerable monuments, or he reared those mystic circles of colossal stones which we call Druidical,—giving to the one and to the other its mysterious consecration. When the tree-pillar and the cross-beam of the Doric cottage had suggested the notions of harmony, of proportion, of relative beauty, the germ existed of the purest and loveliest Grecian temples that have charmed the eyes of mankind, even in their ruins, from age to age.

Song was sacred from the first; as soon as man employed his voice for more than mere purposes of communication, as soon as he felt himself in harmony with the chant of birds and with the sounds of nature, he joined their great, their universal chorus, and, like them, rejoiced in the praises of his Creator. When he saw the beauty and expression of which pictorial effort was capable, it was used to adorn the walls, as it does still of ancient buildings, with the deeds of departed heroes, or with emblems of the power of immortal gods. From the first, there was this consecration. Abundant as Greece was in the noblest works of art, none of them were individual property; none of them were secluded, locked up, like the galleries of modern times. They belonged to heaven and earth, God and humanity. We read of one instance in ancient times of a statue being stolen for its exquisite beauty; but what did the thief with it? No appropriation was attempted; it was only carried to the native town of the robber, and there set up, there consecrated, there open to the public gaze. It was only in the latter days of Roman rapacity that works of art were transformed into private property, that they ceased to have their original affinity with the works of nature,—their affinity as objects of universal contemplation, —their affinity as consecrated to religion and to Deity. The artist originally worked only for his god or gods, for his country, and for his own soul.

And this first influence was an elevating one,—purifying as well as elevating. For, however rude those antique works of art may seem to us, however uncouth,—still they were the productions of greater minds than those of the large majority, and had upon them an expressive power which in its results was good. Even those dog-headed and hawk-headed deities of the Egyptians,—even those old Hindoo idols, with their hundred arms,—those uncouth, emblematical figures of antiquity,—they all impressed the public mind; they did something to raise it. Greece gave the world gods in physical form far above humanity; they idealised the human shape, and made it productive of sensations of beauty or of reverence such as can scarcely be excited by any other means. And the strange saint mythology of the middle ages, how much better was it for the works of the great painters! How much of Elysian beauty, how much of grace and intense loveliness, did they infuse into the subjects which, by their means, were thus consecrated! How low and gross, how pestilential, in many cases, would have been that calendar of questionable saintship, had it not been redeemed by art,—purified, elevated, and made elevating.

The result of this process, however, is obvious,—the end to which it must come. What at first elevates, and by that elevation gains, as it merits, consecration, and by that consecration an undue permanence, becomes the source of degradation. For the mind of man is more progressive than art. Where ignorance reverenced, knowledge might be apt to scorn. The uncouth figures were first passed by the human mind, left behind, as unworthy representatives of divinity. Even the grand and lovely images of the Grecian deities were passed too; the mind could not rest in them either. The great productions of painting in the middle ages are no longer generally worshiped, however prized as works of taste. Art first preceded the human mind, and then it lagged behind. Hence, there is need that this course should be corrected, and other influences and agencies interposed, in order to preserve and keep continuous the development of the religious ideas. Accordingly, two great exceptional cases arose. Moses laid a stern interdict on the arts in religion. He forbade any graven image or any painted image. He attempted to secure a notion of the pure spirituality of the Deity, by forbidding, under the severest penalties, all sensuous representations. He left man with a great void space between him and Divinity, and forbade the attempt to fill up that space by any of these devices or promptings of the imagination. And in this there is one of those contemporaneous agencies for the advancement of mankind in their perception of Deity which I endeavoured to describe in a previous lecture. The mission of Judaism was to teach the spirituality of Deity; while the mission of the Greek mythology was to teach the universality of the Divine presence. The one was effected by means of art rising to its highest perfection; the other by the prohibition of all artistical devices. The course of time led to their combination. After that combination, similar results again followed,—the great superstition of the middle ages; and Protestantism, like Judaism, became prohibitive also. There seems, in the early reformers and their followers, an almost deadly antagonism towards art. The most graceful forms were smashed by their battering-rams. In this country, and still more in Scotland, the work of devastation did not spare productions which not only the antiquary, but the artist, would now give worlds to revive. Spirituality was thus asserted again in a manner similar to that in which it had been asserted by Moses. But each of these views, as I have already pointed out, is partial and erroneous. There is no such war between spirit and matter as theologians have often declared. Pure religion, the highest form of religion, exists in their combination. And accordingly, whilst the abundance of external and sensuous representations in Greece did not prevent her philosophers from forming the most spiritualising theories of Deity, in Judæa and in Protestantism art could not and would not be suppressed. Restricted to architecture, the Jews made their temple one of the wonders of the world; and as they were not allowed to fashion out, in stone or on canvas, their conceptions of intermediate beings between themselves and the Deity, they saw the forms of angels in the ascending smoke of incense from their altars, or those of cherubs stretched out in the clouds of heaven. Protestants, too, listened to the voice of melody; and the Huguenots made converts by their chants. Nature rebels against these proscriptions, and indicates infallibly that religion is for all the faculties of the individual man, as it is for all human beings.

Such, I have no doubt, will be the progress in future times. Tracing, as we do, the combination of influences seemingly so antagonistic, finding so much reason to look favourably on religions which have condemned one another to eternal torments in the future, and to bitter persecutions here,—finding in them influences which, when combined, serve to magnify and exalt religion,—we may well anticipate that eventually human nature will attain a worship suited to itself, which shall combine with the choicest efforts of art, the highest demonstrations of intelligence. It is to be lamented, for the sake both of art and of religion, that the wide separation which has taken place should have ensued. Art is degraded by it; art no longer can boast its inspiration. It has sunk into a servitor of wealth; it works for hire; it no longer speaks of the Divine to the human; it has no religion. Those who give it a religious turn go into fanciful interpretations, and pretend to solve enigmas in ancient architecture,—after all, resembling the speculations of the Jewish cabalists, who found out theological mysteries in the points and dots of the words of their sacred scriptures. Art has lost its highest and best impulse, and so sinks into a comparatively inferior thing. Its successful votary gets himself knighted, and copies the unintellectual faces of kings and emperors, of generals and ambassadors. Its position in the world is forlorn and degraded from what it was at the time when the artist was one of Heaven's ministers for the good and the progress of humanity.

And has religion gained by the change,—gained by being made an intellectual abstraction,—gained by the substitution of the creed for the statue,—gained by sinking in one case into mere parrotry, and in another into mere controversy,—by becoming the worship of words, or the war of words? Religion has lost its life, power, and beauty—all that recommends it to the mind and heart, and makes it a living principle within us, full of life, joy, gladness, and hope—by this transformation, by this separation from its natural alliance, by this alienation from the agency through which in old times it was purified, and would continue to be purified,—only intelligence and science correcting from age to age the aberrations into which we are led whenever we endeavour to make any thing perpetual which is in its own nature but temporary, or venture on distinct anticipations on these matters.

We cannot but expect that there will be again a combination of art and religion, a consecration of art to its highest purpose, and a realisation of religion to the senses, more fully than we or the world has yet beheld. And it is well, as a matter of complacent observance in respect to this, that something like artistical education is spreading itself so widely in this country,—that we have schools of design, as well as schools for reading, writing, and arithmetic. The child may often learn as much religion, or more, from the pictured Christ, than from the answer repeated by rote from the Catechism. Ideas of moral beauty, simplicity, and truth may be instilled through the senses as well as, or better than, by burdening the memory and taxing the yet feeble understanding. An improvement in educational processes is one of the best and surest steps towards this great advancement in the progress of civilisation. Then will mankind generally learn to appreciate art, and they will understand nature better. Where now they cast only a blank gaze upon objects which should make the nerves thrill with delight,—where now their ears are deaf to nature's melodies, as the song of the lark is unheeded by the farmer's boy,—they may become acutely sensible to whatever is most adapted in them to act upon the frame. They will not be led away by art from nature, if there be any thing of truth in the remarks I have previously made on the affinity of art and nature, and how the one is the child of the other; but they will see in both something more worthy of their contemplation, and will find it acting with immensely increased power upon their intellectual and their moral being. And thus, eventually, shall we see religion in its proper relative position, with architecture for her palatial habitation, with sculpture for her perfectness of form, with painting for her variegated robe, and with music for her voice,—a voice not only to praise God, but which also

> "has a song
> For all that to the earth belong."

LECTURE VI.

THE INFLUENCE OF LITERATURE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RELIGIOUS IDEAS.

June 3d, 1849.

LITERATURE, as well as religion, may be called the natural product of humanity. Its elements and the obvious tendencies towards its production preceded its appearance, and may be traced in the earliest stages of society. Before that wonderful and complex result of mind and art, the book, had issued from the press,—before the scribe had copied the manuscript,—before the Peruvian had knotted his historical cords, or the Chinese invented his complex characters, or the Egyptian his more artistical hieroglyphics, —before all these, were the elements of future literature scattered about in the world. The wise man repeated his sayings, and they grew into proverbs. Legends were told by father to son, and transmitted through successive generations. Laws were delivered in verse, that they might be impressed on the memory, and become an inward and abiding power over the life. The Laplander sang his love-songs; the Druids repeated their mysterious and profound triads; the Hebrews had those materials which afterwards, in their book of Jasher, or song, told of the miracles of the conquest, and how Joshua bade the sun and the moon stand still, and was obeyed. And in an analogous state of civilisation, though in a different age and country, the baron's bard celebrated the exploits of his patron, and produced the germs of that ballad-poetry which is still the delightful study alike of the antiquary and of the man of taste. In all countries we find the foreshadowing of coming literature. The songs of Ossian, whatever may be thought of their modernised form, were doubtless a reality, corresponding with the traditions of the country, and reflecting the enduring memorials impressed on forests and mountains, caverns and waterfalls; and, above all, the poems of Homer are said thus to have been long transmitted, orally repeated by bards, whose rhapsodies charmed the ear of those by whom they were listened to, and in that yet comparatively shapeless condition giving forms to their gods, and creating or maturing their mythology,—and also raising the ideal of human character, and giving it its heroic attributes. Literature, not only in its full development, but even in those previous elements from which its combinations arose, was a power in the earth,—a harmonising power as to religion, a corrective power as to religion; and it is in this relation that I endeavour to trace it in the present discourse. I consider it as one of the modifying influences over the development of the religious ideas in humanity.

Literature originally was, in some respects, a greater power than it is in our times. Its diffusion has become prodigious; but its intensity has been thereby diminished. Now it is comparatively the common lot and possession. Books are indeed cheapened in the market, those treasures of the thoughts of the greatest minds; the same power, which at first was regarded as an inspiration from heaven, and which claimed its close affinity with whatever was most sacred and most reverenced, has now become one of the homely arts and appliances of life. From speculating on the nature of God, it descends to things of human concern;—from making the mind its throne, to scattering abroad the seeds of usefulness; it comes to us in our houses; it interferes, it gives directions as to the simplest and homeliest operations; it is, as I said, the common lot and heritage of mortals. In this diffusion there is, no doubt, great good, though we cannot but desiderate the time when the diffusion, being carried yet further, shall revive the original intensity,—when the capability of appreciating whatever is most just and true, most noble and grand in literature, shall be as common as is the power to spell and read,—when the great masters of the human mind, the immortal nobility of literature, shall be the familiar companions of the inhabitants of the cottage. But for this we have yet long to wait; and to estimate aright the power of literature as a modifying influence over the religious ideas, we must look back to the time when literature was really and truly an inspiration,—when there was no thought of popularity,—when the trade of book-making was not even imagined,—when there was no descending to the level of ignorance, no courting the absurdities of prejudice,—when the poet spake because the word was in his mind and in his heart, because it burned within him so that he could not but speak,—when the philosopher recorded the result of his solitary contemplations because he wished to give a permanent form and embodiment to the mighty truths which had developed themselves to his eager gaze, and which he felt to be truths belonging not to himself alone but to humanity,—when there were those who, hearing the legends and traditions of the priests and other learned men in different countries, could not but weave them together into continuous story, preserving the records of the past for the benefit of the future,—until the laurelled historian read the result of his researches and of his ramblings amid the applause of assembled multitudes. Literature then was indeed a power, which might almost be considered as coördinate with religion,—at any rate, a power adapted to exercise a purifying influence over it, to check its errors, and promote its advances. It was in itself a new creation, an inspiration, almost a religion. And whether literature be in a state of harmony with or antagonism towards the specific form of religion that prevails at any time and in any country, in both cases its influence is good. It cannot but be good. Its power in preserving truth is, from its own nature, greater than its power of disseminating and perpetuating error. It is so because literature, like religion, ascends to elemental principles in human nature. Its fountains are in the mind; it goes back to that great source of all true thought and feeling, as religion does. It has a counteractive tendency to those agencies which tend to the deterioration of specific forms of religion. There are such tendencies in all specific forms of religion. The priest may at first be the people's teacher and their worthy guide in offering their homage to the great overruling Power; but what is the tendency of his position? To make him arrogate to himself peculiar character and communications, to make him stand in a fancied mid-way between the human and the Divine, to lead him to arrogate to himself the position of a mediator between God and man, and, with that, of a lord over the human conscience. The temple is an artistical expression of man's homage to the Deity, the gathering point in which that is made social which, by becoming social as well as individual, increases its power over the intellect and the feelings; but, as the consecration of the temple rises in man's mind, other earth is desecrated, the world ceases to be holy; that soil which bears its flowers and sends up its fragrant incense is no longer the floor of God's temple, or the altar of his praises. Sacred psalms imply profane songs; thoughts become words, but words are repeated unmeaningly; and in this state of things, the natural history of specific forms of religion, which are in themselves an artificial product,—in this state, literature comes in with its benignant influence; and even if it adopts the superstition, even if it praises the error, yet there is in it that exercise of the first principles of thought and feeling in humanity which tends to purify, to give meaning where the forms had worn it out altogether, and thus "to create a soul beneath those ribs of death." True, the mind of the writer may be enslaved; a mighty understanding may be bowed to the adoption of puerile dogmas and childish paradoxes. We have an instance of this in one of the most majestic of human minds, that of Lord Bacon,—a most remarkable instance, when he professes his religious faith; but as remarkable a counteraction, as I shall show, when he falls back upon his own resources as the man of literature. Lord Bacon speaks thus of "the characters of a believing Christian, in paradoxes and seeming contradictions:"

"1. A Christian is one that believes things his reason cannot comprehend; he hopes for things which neither he nor any man alive ever saw; he labours for that which he knoweth he shall never obtain: yet in the issue his belief appears not to be false; his hope makes him not ashamed; his labour is not in vain.

"2. He believes three to be one, and one to be three; a Father not to be elder than his Son; a Son to be equal with his Father; and one proceeding from both to be equal with both: he believing three persons in one nature, and two natures in one person.

"3. He believes a virgin to be a mother of a Son; and that very Son of hers to be her Maker. He believes him to have been shut up in a narrow room whom heaven and earth could not contain. He believes him to have been born in time who was and is from everlasting. He believes him to have been a weak child carried in arms who is the Almighty; and him once to have died who only hath life and immortality in himself.

"4. He believes the God of all grace to have been angry with one that hath never offended him; and that God that hates sin to be reconciled to himself, though sinning continually, and never making or being able to make him satisfaction. He believes a most just God to have punished a most just person, and to have justified himself, though a most ungodly sinner. He believes himself freely pardoned, and yet a sufficient satisfaction was made for him."

Such are the avowed paradoxes into which this great intellect, following implicitly the established creeds of his time, was led. But, in his *Essay on Superstition,* he begins, in his own proper human person, to reason upon all this; and let us note how clearly he traces the progress of those causes of whose results he had given a striking illustration in his own example. He says:

"The causes of superstition are pleasing and sensual rites and ceremonies; excess of outward and pharisaical holiness; over-great reverence of traditions, which cannot but load the Church; the stratagems of prelates for their own ambition and lucre; the favouring too much of good intentions, which openeth the gate to conceits and novelties; the taking an aim at divine matters by human, which cannot but breed mixture of imaginations; and, lastly, barbarous times, especially joined with calamities and disasters. Superstition, without a veil, is a deformed thing; for as it addeth deformity to an ape to be so like a man, so the similitude of superstition to religion makes it the more deformed; and as wholesome meat corrupteth to little worms, so good forms and orders corrupt into a number of petty observances."

And such is the common history of specific forms of religion; such is their degeneracy, unchecked by literature. But wherever literature has grown up, it has preserved alive, even in such forms of religion, the scintillations of truth, occasionally fanning them into a flame, and preventing the outer expression of religion from becoming totally and altogether corrupt, absurd, and degraded. And this tendency is obvious, not only in Lord Bacon's case, but in every instance where a great mind has bowed itself to superstition, or to the specific and narrow forms that prevailed at the particular time. If we glance at some of the most eminent of these instances, we always find in them a redeeming quality and power, a something which more than balances the seeming countenance they give to superstition. Look at that stern Italian poet, so inexorable in his faith and in his consecration of belief as needful to salvation, so merciless towards the most illustrious heathens —even those whom he most loved and reverenced being, by his creed, excluded from the least chance of eternal bliss—look at that stern yet tender Dante, how he works out his gloomiest ideas. In his *Inferno,* when he introduces Francesca da Rimini, how the soul is touched and the affections are moved by the gentleness and love which he infuses even into the dreary abodes of the lost! Listen to the utterances from his purgatorial mountain; the acclamations of sympathy and joy almost shake the mighty structure to its base, when one of their number is freed from his purifying toils and sufferings, and ascends from the penance to the enjoyment of peace and glory. Look at his stern rebukes of the false shepherds of his day, of the papal power, then in all its dignity and vindictiveness; how well and justly, how truly and powerfully, he exposes its corruptions and lashes its iniquities! Then there is our own Milton, believer as he was, at the time his great poem was produced, in the mysteries of Calvinistic theology: look at him while even, as Pope says, he makes God the Father talk like "a school divine." In that strange work, so grand even in its strangeness—so great and glorious and beautiful, even with all its dimming shadows—what a redeeming quality is there in those bowers of innocence from which Adam and Eve are expelled, but which are ever open to the world,—which have become, through those lovely pictures of the poet, the heritage of human nature! What truth and beauty is there in his *Paradise Regained;* even while he held the doctrine of satisfaction, removing the attention or perception from the Divine wrath, the agony and suffering, and placing it on that innate strength by which the Redeemer confronted and repelled either the solitary or the social temptation! Look at the writings of Jeremy Taylor, and other believers in doctrines uncouth and fearful. Amidst them all, on that barren soil, what a luxuriance of beautiful vegetation have imagination and intellect produced! How does all that is loveliest and richest of ancient or modern lore blend together, until we forget the formalities of the writer's theology, and stand in mute admiration and complacency at the beauties he has shed with so profuse a hand over its worst characteristics! Or, to take up a homelier case,—one of the multitude, and speaking to the multitude,—what can be worse, what more alien from all just reasoning or faith, than the Calvinistic metaphysics of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress?* What trait could be less attractive than the cowardly and selfish character of his hero, "Christian," who runs away from the City of Destruction to save himself, leaving wife and family and all with whom he is connected to be consumed in those showers of fire and brimstone which he anticipates,—who has no thought for any one but himself, who speeds off on the wings of the wind to take care of his own worthless person? Yet, with materials such as these, drawn from the theology which he professed, what a beauty has he not created, what a dramatic character and knowledge of human nature has he not infused into such characters as those of Mr. By-ends! What magnificence of scenery has he not portrayed when he conducts his pilgrims to those Delectable Mountains whence they obtain a glimpse of the city of glory, and which, though the cold, dark river of death flows between, is regarded as the bourne and end of all! Religion cannot be utterly debased while there exists a literature. The mighty principles of the human imagination will still vindicate themselves, and will do much, indeed, for preserving religion in comparative purity.

How was the great European Reformation accomplished? There had been acute theologians and conscientious men before the time of Luther. Amongst the varied causes of the Reformation, while some were theological, others were not so. The revival of ancient letters was amongst the latter; and a great and influential agency it was. It was not simply that men reverted to the Scriptures; it was not that they said, "The Bible and the Bible only is the religion of Protestants." I do not say that this was not much of that great change, but it was not all; it was very far indeed from being all. It was that men had taken to their forgotten classics, that the free spirits of Greece and Rome had left their graves, and were walking abroad on the earth; that men's minds were intent upon those undying pages;—they caught their spirit and their power. Aristotle ruled in their schools of logic; and whenever they attempted to soar, as on angels' wings, towards heaven, there was Plato at hand, guiding, directing, and still pointing upwards.

Classical literature was one great cause of the Reformation. And in that Reformation, which reformed itself indeed, in that better and more generous spirit which, after a time, suppressed the first rudeness, bitterness, and tendency to persecution that showed itself in those whom we call the great reformers, we still mark the traces of literature which have passed over the region. Rousseau and Voltaire might disgust, by their anti-Christian tendencies, the minds of multitudes; they might, in that antagonism, have gone most unwarrantable lengths in the scorn and contempt which they endeavoured to throw upon what the majority of their countrymen held sacred; but, after all allowances and deductions, the fact is, that their writings, and such as theirs, established toleration in Europe, shamed the world, laughed the world, terrified the world, out of a persecution which had once been reckoned amongst the ordinary courses of human action, and introduced that more just and generous spirit of religious liberty and equality in states, and that mutual tolerance for diversities of opinion and practice in individuals, which ushered in a better and a brighter day.

If we look at the Scriptures themselves, and inquire what is their character,—what is that of a large portion, and the best portion, of the Bible? It was not the production of professional theologians. Their priests were the guardians and expounders of the law and the keepers of their records; but it is not the writings of the Jewish priesthood which constitute the most precious and the most worthily preserved portions of the Bible. The prophets were not priests; they were not even Levites; they belonged to other tribes—they were laymen; their writings were the literature rather than the sacred books at that time, though they became so afterwards, of the

Jewish people. Called from every station by the divine influence within them,—from Isaiah, with the royal blood in his veins, to the peasant prophets of the Old Testament, or the fishermen apostles of the New Testament,—they were still of the Jewish laity, and not of the Jewish priesthood. Not one writer of the New Testament, except Matthew, perhaps, was even a Levite; none of them priests, any more than Christ himself. All that portion of the Bible which gives us the grandest views of Deity, the largest views of the world, the purest conceptions of duty,—all that tends to make Judaism and Christianity so superior to other specific forms of religion,—is the work of those who might be regarded as the Hebrew laity; it belongs to literature rather than to theology.

Such, then, has been the course of influence and agency in this matter. Literature gives meaning and spirit to the uncouth forms of Egyptian and of Indian idolatry. Literature gave grace and expression and loveliness to the gods of Greece. Literature softened the sternness of antique Judaism, and played around the rudeness of Mahometanism. Literature reformed Christianity; it prevented Popery from becoming a mere thing of show and form, and Protestantism from becoming a mere thing of logic and verbal controversy. It is not so much in the divines as in the literary men of our nation—its poets and philosophers—that we must seek for the real religion of our country. They have enshrined its holiest principles; they have taught its best lessons. Whilst the priesthood of modern times, like the priesthood of ancient times, has been busy in taking its tithes and in keeping its chronicles,—whilst to it we may owe something of law and of precept, of tradition and of miracle,—it is to literature that we owe all that gives spiritual life to these else dead forms,—which in denying them shows us a religion in its simplicity and its purity,—which even in accepting them elevates and exalts them far above the sphere to which they would else descend, and to which they would drag down their votaries. It is in literature that we find religion, through the long course of those illustrious men who have won for our country its highest glories; we trace it back through them in a long succession of inspired volumes up to him,—that "well of English undefiled," old Chaucer,—the patriarch of our poetry, who, even in the agonies of death, sang his song, and left his enduring lesson that

> "Truth to thine own heart
> Thy soul shall save."

LECTURE VII.

The Influence of Science on the Development of the Religious Ideas.

July 1*st*, 1849.

"The age of science" is no inappropriate appellation for the last three centuries and a half, which have witnessed such a succession of marvellous discoveries. At no period of the world's history has there been any thing comparable to the annals of this time for the rapidly increasing and extending knowledge of the facts of nature,—for the careful classification of those facts, and the educement from them of general laws,—and for the application of those laws to the useful arts. The period is altogether unprecedented for this course of events: from its first great and splendid work in the invention of printing,—which made common that which had been the peculiar treasure of the student and the philosopher,—to the operation of the electric telegraph, which in its rapid communications abolishes both time and space. This period has been characterised by discoveries both in the world of matter and in that of mind. A new world has been made known to us,—a world which may become the scene of heroic deeds, of intellectual progress, that shall influence to an extent yet incalculable the destinies of the human race. One discovery after another, in rapid succession, marked the earlier portions of this period. Then we find the telescope and the microscope brought into use, revealing to us remote worlds of immense magnitude, and those scarcely less astonishing discoveries of the minute world which are thus laid open to our gaze. Chemistry, as a science, has had its origin and growth, and the approaches it has made towards maturity, in this same course of years. The human frame has become better understood,—the tissues of which it is composed, the circulation of the blood,—the various means and appliances which bear upon its well-being. And while the human body has been thus better understood, the human mind also has had many of its laws and principles laid open and familiarly demonstrated. Science has made a succession of revelations,—revelations more astonishing, perhaps, than any other which have ever claimed that title. The knowledge of Divine power in its works, and of the creatures by whom it is contemplated,—these are revelations to which we can find no superior, no parallel; they are an assured and certain acquaintance with truth, and which, therefore, well deserve to be so designated.

And this course of science has shown itself irresistible, both in its own progress, and in many of its results. It has been no cycle of systems, each advancing upon the ruins of its predecessor. It is no succession of systems, rising like the billows of the sea, but, like them, breaking before other advancing billows. Philosophical speculations unfounded upon the certain truths of nature must and did thus supersede one another; religions even had their rise and their fall; but not so science,—science that began to be pursued systematically and by induction during the period to which I have referred. Its advance knows no retreat; once learnt, it is never unlearnt. Errors which have been abolished by mere dogma may find their turn in the world,—may rise again and expel the very doctrines to which they have yielded. The uncertainties of theology continue: the Athanasian and Arian controversy is waged now, as it was waged in the third and fourth centuries. The perplexities of Origen about the construction of a text remain perplexities to the divine of the present day. One interpretation succeeds to another; each has its time, and then is abandoned. The error which is exploded by theology only is not certainly on that account for ever banished from the world. But science in its march has no such fluctuations. It holds on like the car of Juggernaut, crushing not human life and thought, but crushing errors and falsehoods never to revive. Its progress, its continuous advance, is as certain as that of the engine wrought upon by the mighty power of steam, overwhelming the trifling obstacles which might impede any thing less powerful. It is like to the Pontic Sea,

> "Whose icy current and compulsive course
> Ne'er feels retiring ebb, but keeps due on
> To the Propontic and the Hellespont."

How many theological errors have already given way before this resistless progress? How many are giving way at this time, and evidently doomed to destruction,—fated to be obliterated from men's belief, to be expunged from their creeds, to pass altogether into oblivion? It must surely be worth while to inquire what these results have been, how we may estimate them, in what we may calculate on their future multiplication; and in this way to arrive at the value of science as one of the modifying influences over the development of the religious ideas. It is in this view, and in pursuance of the point to which all my lectures in the present year have been directed,—the endeavour to trace these modifying influences and causes,—that I now turn towards science as one of the most powerful.

Some years ago I gave a course of lectures in this place on the effects of science as influencing religious belief and doctrine; and then I took the sciences in their order, endeavouring to estimate the power and particular effects of each. The three most important sciences,—geology, astronomy, and the philosophy of the human mind,—as greatest in themselves, have had the greatest result in thus correcting the errors of human intelligence, and of professed revelation,—in abating the claims of that infallibility which is often set up to repress thought, and keep it subservient, and within limits assigned for its operation. But whilst the greatest sciences have done the greatest work in this course of theological correction and improvement, we find that they have all done something, and that every contribution to human knowledge, derived from the study of the truths of nature, has had its effect in banishing some fallacy or other derived from implicit credence. Having taken at that time the sciences in their order, I shall now pursue the other course, of adverting in succession to the different errors in religion which have been abated or destroyed by the advances of science.

Amongst the most obvious of these is that which, at no very remote period, was the universal religious faith of this and other countries of Christendom, and, under a different phase, of heathenism: I mean the belief in witchcraft,—in the power of words, and spells, and charms, and compacts with invisible powers. Two or three centuries ago, who did not believe this? Who of the Church, or of dissenting bodies,—

of Catholics or of Protestants,—of the most orthodox or of heretics, according to their varied forms of creed? Who did not believe it, seeing that it reached even philosophers themselves, and such a mind as that of Sir Thomas Browne gave testimony to its reality, making him an accessory to the punishment inflicted on those who were arraigned and convicted of this alleged crime? It was the general faith; nay, more than that, it had the express sanction of the Bible,—denounced there as a crime, recorded there as a fact, made liable there to mortal punishment. And yet, with all this, it has become obsolete,—or as nearly obsolete as may be. There are, indeed, still dark corners in the country in which faith in it is found to linger. An instance occurred only this last week, in the county of Suffolk, of a man who sought to break the influence of an evil eye by "fetching blood" from the supposed witch "above the breath." An instance or two have occurred lately in Scotland; but they are instances occurring in circumstances where science cannot be expected to penetrate, amongst persons remote even from the common influences that act upon the human mind, and over whom, if there be any power exercised, it is only the power of that blind theology which science has not yet couched, nor given it the sight of realities. And when we speak of this as an obsolete error, it is not merely a speculative error of which we talk. For, at one period, this notion brooded over mankind like a blighting curse. In multitudes of instances it embittered the course of human life; it aggravated the agonies of disease. The victim of consumption, wasting away under its influence, had his imagination strongly directed to the thought that some power was being exercised over him, some malign and demoniacal power,—that the waxen image of his frame was gradually wasting, and, as it wasted, he also must pine away in all the agonies of a lingering death. The parent, anxiously watching the fragility of his child,—the symptoms of health or sickness,—had that anxiety rendered more intense and fearful by the notion that this was the effect of some evil eye that had been cast upon the loved one, and that there was a power at work which no skill could counteract, with which no physician could contend, which no prayers could remove. Thence arose a hatred, an intensity of hatred, consecrated by religion, towards the unhappy creatures who were accused of this crime, which broke out in the persecution that raged all over Europe, full of iniquity, of bitterness, and of blood.

This has passed away. How? Not by the power of theology; not under the exposure of truth-giving preachers in their pulpits; it has not fallen before the power of Churches, established or voluntary. It was driven from the world by science,—by science simply, by science alone, and in spite of many remonstrances from the theology of the day. It disappeared as the Royal Society, with its discussions, arose in this country. It was driven first from the notions of scientific men; then, by their means, from the general intelligence of the country; and, at length, from the law of the country;—whilst implicit faith yet clings only to some shadow of it, endeavours to reconcile the present with the past by some quirk or figment, and supposes that, though there are not wizards and possessions now, there have been in former times,—that in the days of miracle the devil was let loose for a season that miraculous power might be shown in his expulsion,—and thus still holds the possibility that what has been may occur again, vainly striving after some retention of the past error, even when the fallacy has been thoroughly demonstrated. It is to science that the praise should be rendered for this achievement; it was by its power, and under its increasing light, that charms, and witchcraft, and magic, and possessing fiends, and demons who delighted in destroying the works of industry, all "made themselves air, into which they vanished."

Together with this, there has also passed away from the world the notion of special interpositions, although made by a very different power, and for very different purposes. Once the course of events seemed to be all interpositions. Genial seasons were a smiling Deity; storms and tempests were a frowning God. Every thing was supposed to be done by an immediate exercise of power; and in prayer was believed to reside an influence that could turn aside this course. How much of this we still find in the doctrine and recorded experience of the more enthusiastic sects! But generally, and so far as religion is connected with intelligence, this theory of special interpositions is another fallacy which science has expelled. In the storm at sea the missionary may pray; but the captain, whose sagacity knows something of the law of storms, and how to apply it, steers his ship so as to avoid the tornado, and thus saves both the vessel and the crew, without which prayer might unceasingly cry, as did the priests of Baal to their god, unheard; for the elemental laws hold on their course,—they work according to that principle of order which is impressed upon them, and they heed not tears or supplications. How many still there are who, on any calamity falling on those who think and act differently from themselves, cry out, "A judgment!" How often we hear of this, especially from those whom the Sabbatarian principle has strongly impressed. And yet, whilst exerting their power to make the Sunday a day of imprisonment, as it were, to the population of the country,—whilst looking with an eager eye towards every accident which they think may warn the sinner, and be recorded as an interposition and a judgment,—how awkward it is for them to deal with the fact that the railways which run trains on the Sabbath have actually had fewer accidents than those that do not! I would not on this account retort the conclusion, but show the fallacy of the principle on which any such judgment or inference is founded. It sees Deity only in that which is preternatural; and, therefore, as the knowledge of nature, of nature's laws, and nature's phenomena, advances, according to such views the Deity is gradually expelled from his own world. Identify Divinity with law, with order, with nature, and this faith in law fills the world with God, and shows Divinity in all things, leading us onward to the contemplation and reverence of the universal whole.

I must pause here, for the present, in my enumeration of the effects of science upon theological doctrine. But, even in these preliminary instances, how much of anxiety is dispelled, how many clouds and mists that once brooded over the earth are scattered, never again to exercise their depressing and bewildering influence! Nature looks with a calmer and gladder face, seen in this light. We no longer think of its convulsions, but of its returning seasons, of its successive changes, of all its orderliness, its harmony, and its joy. The mountains, that used to tremble at the presence of Jehovah, now stand as altars of the universal

Father, their summits radiant with the light which seems to descend from heaven to enkindle the sacrifice they bear, and their pine-groves rich in those melodies which ascend to Him in accordant anthems of praise and glory. All seems clearer, gladder, brighter; and the devotion of man should partake of that spirit. As knowledge, by its clearer discoveries, gives firmness and distinctness to his perceptions, so should he find himself at one with nature in all its diversity and brightness, and his offerings of devotion should partake of that same spirit, should bear the same character. The song of humanity, when mankind praise their Maker, should be

> "Natural as the breeze
> That stirs amongst the forest-trees."

LECTURE VIII.

THE INFLUENCE OF SCIENCE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RELIGIOUS IDEAS (*continued*).

July 15*th*, 1849.

THE faith of Christendom is every where in a state of dilapidation. The Churches retain their creeds and forms; but the life and heart of them are eaten out. You nowhere find an extent of real, vital belief corresponding with the extent of professed dogmas or of still observed forms. Could meetings be fairly held, and would they speak freely, of the members of either Catholic or Protestant Churches,—could they show, by the ordinary external signs of such assemblies, what it is that they do believe, and what they do not believe; what they rest on with unwavering confidence, and what it is about which they are sorely sceptical,—the results, it is evident to any observer, would be very far indeed from corresponding with the original and yet continued creeds, rites, and forms of such Churches. The Church of England—the Episcopal Church—gained in America a certain portion of freedom; and what was the immediate result? One of its most important and prominent creeds—the Athanasian—having its use left free, fell so immediately into disuse as to become in not many years an antiquarian curiosity in theology. It is evident that, even in dissenting bodies, with all their care, there are continual modifications going on. The scepticism or heresy of individuals is known and winked at, so long as they do not make open profession thereof, or set about proselytising. The same process which went on in America, in modern times, with the Episcopal Church, had previously been exhibited by the Presbyterians of this country, who, beginning with a commencement so slight as that of not severely taxing the professed faith of communicants when admitted to the Lord's table, passed from the highest degree of Calvinism to the lowest degree of Socinianism or Unitarianism. And this is the case every where. We always find this incongruity between real existing faith, or the want of it, and those forms which are still preserved in their integrity, and to which a verbal and conventional homage continues to be rendered. Could we take stock in theology, as tradesmen do in business, how much of the amount of faith treasured up three centuries ago would be found now in existence? Why, theology is on the verge of bankruptcy, could any such operation be instituted. It is like an army after a battle,—much of their artillery silenced, their colours taken, or torn and tattered, and the glittering array in which they appeared in the morning sun changed for lamentable vacancies in their ranks, and for marks of the bitter and bloody strife in which they have been engaged. Or it is like a very common image in Europe now,—a bombarded town. Towers are tottering to their fall,—palaces in ruins, —churches unroofed, and many of their adornments and Christian insignia levelled with the ground,—places "where merchants most do congregate" reduced to a scene of dreary desolation. And what is all this? what does it mean? Some destructive power has been at work, especially for these last three centuries, upon the Christian faith; it has left the traces of its demolishing, its annihilating, its destroying energy. And is this all it can do, or has done? What is it? What is its tendency? If these be the immediate results, what are the ultimate consequences? These questions surely are worth asking? The solution, I think, will be found in the topic to which this portion of my present course of lectures relates, namely, the antagonism between theology and science.

It would be very easy to enlarge the list of those antagonisms I commenced the last time I spoke here. Many, indeed, are the points at which theology and science come into direct collision. Theology tells us—it is based upon the doctrine—that death was brought into the world by sin; that it exists as the punishment of sin, divinely inflicted; that without sin there would have been no death. Science tells us a very different tale: it affirms that death has existed from the first; that it followed close on the footsteps of the earliest life the world witnessed, and has continued ever since; that, in fact, death is a law as extensive as life; that that which begins in this scene of things must come to an end also; and that thus it was ages before man sinned, ages before man existed. Theology tells us, that Divine power moulded the human shape in clay,—made a model in red earth of bones and arteries and veins, of the nerves and sinews, the fibres and the brain, of the human being, and, having so fashioned it, divinely breathed into it the breath of life, and man became a living soul. Science—physiological science—traces no such process, nor exhibits its compatibility with the fine tissues that form the physical human constitution, sees no analogy with it in the growth of the embryo, and looks for the production of human life in modes which bear a closer resemblance, as results of the same laws, to those which have produced animal life in all the varied regions of the earth, and animal life every where suited to the vegetable life and to the other physical conditions in which that vitality exists.

Theology tells us that the animal creation was originally mild and tame and gentle; that there were no beasts of prey, or that they had not then the ferocious nature of beasts of prey; and that, for the transgression of man, the curse came upon them, and they began to devour one another: the work being an evidence that sin and suffering and death had come into the world by a new and an arbitrary ordination. Science looks at the constitution of animals; sees how some are made to be carnivorous, as others are made to be graminivorous; traces not only the existing races of animals, but, by their fossil remains, races which existed before them, and have succeeded one to another through a course of ages that defies the power of our arithmetic to calculate; and finds every where that there were creatures for which other creatures were food, and that this was one modification of the great law of life and death which existed from the first development of organised being.

Theology tells of a local heaven, where Divinity erects its throne and holds its court, surrounded by angels and archangels, whom it despatches on missions to this world,—as those that came and feasted with Abraham,—or as Gabriel, who announced to the Virgin Mary the approaching birth of the Saviour; a heaven to which Elijah was borne in a chariot of fire, and to which Christ ascended from the summit of the Mount of Olives. Well, science looks for this heaven, and finds stars beyond stars, and systems beyond systems. It measures the speed of light, and calculates, by such means as it can, their distance from this world of ours. It counts up the thousands and the millions of years that this light has taken to travel to this globe; and it finds nowhere—no power of the telescope discovers—the heaven which theology teaches. If it exist at all, it must exist beyond the immense distances to which the telescope pierces in the abyss of space. Well, then, at such a distance, how are we to receive the narratives? The archangel Gabriel announced to Mary the birth of Christ: suppose him to wing his flight even with the speed of light, he must have been despatched on that mission ages before Adam was created. The chariot of fire that bore Elijah to heaven cannot have arrived there yet, but must be still tilting its way amongst the stars,—capable, perhaps, from its splendour, of being perceived by the gaze of astronomers; and Christ must be ascending still, through region beyond region of suns and worlds and systems.

Theology tells us that man is made a Christian by a preternatural agency exercised immediately upon his heart; that his old nature is destroyed, and that a new nature is thus miraculously formed within him. Science traces, with its accurate and piercing eye, the links which bind together thoughts and sensations; it tracks them through their course, subtle though it be, and finds the chain unbroken; it accounts—or, in proportion to the means afforded to it, it can account—for every thought, sensation, purpose, and aspiration; and it lays bare the natural results which, under certain circumstances, are vaunted as preternatural changes.

Theology tells the world that the same body shall live again, and live for ever; that the bones and sinews and decaying flesh which are put into the grave shall revive. Science watches their change, their decomposition, their incorporation with vegetable life and animal life; it calculates the surface of the earth, where crowds are congregated, and live and die; and it finds that the same atoms must perform the same duty over and over again, and that where vast multitudes have been bred on the same spot, any recomposition, so as to constitute the material identity of each body, is a complete physical impossibility. The elemental powers and the ultimate atoms of the frame do their work over and over again, and will continue to do so, in the perpetuation of the human race. Here, then, we have a long string of incongruities, which I might easily continue, where science contradicts theology; and in consequence of that contradiction, though the doctrines continue to be professed, by some they are modified, by some they are renounced, by some they are held but in words only, with a kind of conventional adhesion, which sustains towards them a profession of reverence that seems almost a mockery, whilst they cannot continue to exercise their power as objects of a living faith.

All these doctrines may be considered, if not actually abolished, as in the course of abolition. They have their sentences upon them; they are doomed; they are merely awaiting the season for execution. It is a question of time, and of nothing else. The two most important and most pernicious doctrines to which science has opposed itself are those of something external to man, the oracles of which are infallible, and of a voluntary power in man to modify and change his faith. Science is opposed to both these. Physical science has done much towards demolishing the one, and mental science destroys the other. Infallibility in words—the words of an unknown tongue—words which were only spoken by human beings centuries upon centuries ago,—infallibility in these, with all the thousand interpretations to which they are liable, may make men quibblers—it may make them sophists; it cannot insure their being real believers. Sometimes this infallibility is claimed for that which can be brought to the test of material evidence. Joshua commanded the sun to stand still. Joshua spake in ignorance of the nature of the solar system. Are we to suppose that infallibility or inspiration speaks in ignorance? This lands us upon a contradiction in terms. Nor—supposing that merely the result is indicated; that the motion of the earth was suspended instead of that of the sun—could this have happened without leaving physical traces on every portion of the globe. There are no such traces. Earth confronts the assertion with a silent but a decisive negative. It is often assumed that we may believe as we choose; and this is the principle of persecution. An elementary acquaintance with the phenomena of the human mind and its laws at once puts this notion to flight. A man must believe according to the apparent weight of the evidence that is presented to his mind. Give the evidence, and give the constitutional peculiarities of the mind, and we have two known quantities, which will not leave the faith of the individual an unknown quantity. And yet, what has not been done by these two tenets? What a wretched word-wrangle have they made of theology! What hatreds, what accusations, what suspicions, what condemnations, what persecutions, have they not caused! They have wrought the world more mischief than any other fallacious tenets consecrated by theology; and science, by putting them down, is achieving one of its best and purest and most blessed victories.

Still, this process is a long one. The prejudices of multitudes, the honest faith and honest fearfulness of many, the arts and the power of priestcraft, are all combined against it. How many there are who imitate the conduct of the Brahmin! Boasting that he and his class never destroyed life, a drop of the water he drank was shown him in the microscope, full of living creatures; and what did the Brahmin? He broke the microscope, and so settled the controversy. There are many Christians who should break the telescope also, if they would keep their tenets unimpaired. Their weapons were the dungeon and brute force; and the heralds of science in modern times have too many of them been martyrs. Even since the more rough and violent modes fell into disuse, driven back by the advancing progress of science, of a better feeling, and of the toleration which it brought in its train,—still how much of bitterness there is in society, how heavy a proscription hangs over the head of the man who dares, not only to think for himself, but to speak for himself! What fierce contests have we seen where external profession and conventional doctrine might seem to be discountenanced by any procedure! How violently were all the clergy of Scotland uproused, some years ago, at Professor Leslie's occupying a professor's chair in the University of Edinburgh, simply because he had declared his reception of the plain, common-sense doctrine of cause and effect, as taught by Hume,—namely, that all we know of the relation is a constant conjunction between that which we call the cause and that which we call the effect;—a very harmless theory, a very probable theory,—but against which the cry of heresy and infidelity was loudly raised. In the plan for establishing three or four provincial colleges in Ireland, what difficulty has not been experienced from the Catholic hierarchy demanding the right to have a veto upon certain scientific professors! They are fearful of an anatomical professor, of a geological professor; and thus it is that a priesthood desires a veto upon scientific professors, lest science should put a veto upon theological doctrines.

The effect of all this is, that men of science become careful, prudent, conformist in their language with received opinions; careful of never exposing a contrariety between the scientific discovery and the verbally received theological doctrine. A book which made a noise some few years ago —*The Vestiges of Creation*—contains scarcely a fact in science which was not generally admitted anterior to its publication; but what the book did was this,—it brought these admitted facts into comparison with received doctrines in theology; and hence the clamour, hence the vain attempt to back out of what had been acknowledged fact; hence the mystification that threatened to invade the regions of science, and pervert it, and make its undying truths bend to the theological dogma of the passing hour. Then science is received but partially. It gets abroad in the world by fits and starts,—here a little, and there a little. Hence its full force is not perceived; and, its collision with theology being thus kept out of sight, it requires the lapse of a considerable period for the result to be obtained in that modification of religious opinions which yet must infallibly be made in the long-run by scientific discoveries and principles. For there can be no compromise in this matter; truth is enduring as nature itself; truth once ascertained becomes a principle with which it is in vain to struggle. Theology must yield at last. The mischief is, that before it yields, it prolongs the reign of ignorance and error; it prolongs the existence of hypocrisy; it extends that existence; and it enfeebles and perverts the mind, by accustoming men to a quibbling and sophistical attempt at reconciling tenets which will not in their very nature admit of reconciliation.

There is, then—and that owing to the existence of theology—a considerable amount of evil attendant on this process of science in the correction of theological errors.

The greater is the need to guard against any unnecessary amount of error of this sort. We should not allow the process to be merely a negative one. Science is constructive as well as destructive; and were it allowed a more free and open course—were so much noise not made about these contrarieties, as occasions for accusations of heresy and infidelity, the constructive tendencies of science would appear. They would develop themselves, as they ought to be developed, by those who understand these important subjects. They would develop themselves in the gradual growth of devotional sentiments and moral principles,—of a disposition that would take possession of the human mind, and there exercise a lasting influence. For science has its religion, science has its morality; and it never displaces any thing worthy of the name, as connected with specific systems of religion, without replacing it by something better, purer, and loftier. If it destroys the reverence men once felt for Deity as a worker of strange wonders in the earth, it gives for these a grander class of wonders, exciting a deeper reverence. In whatever was supposed to illustrate the Divine majesty, power, or benignity,—if it destroys legendary stories, which were cherished because they were thought subservient to these purposes, it gives, instead of them, ascertained and demonstrated facts, which excite these same devotional feelings more strongly, and raise them to a greater height. Science is in harmony with nature, with the facts of nature, with the poetry of nature; and they combine to produce that state of mind which best becomes the creature in relation to the Creator, and rational creatures in their relations towards each other. Science, with a louder voice, and in a more enduring speech, and one more generally intelligible than theology, ascribes "glory to God in the highest," and cultivates "peace on earth, and good-will amongst men." And science is much more sure than theology of making progress in the world, of gaining proselytes in all countries, of causing its power to be felt, whatever may be the religion which locally prevails. Theology is always a limited power; science is a universal power. There is no speech like that of the stars, no speech nor language where their voice is not heard; the sound goes out to the ends of the earth; and under its benignant influence men behold the dawn of a brighter religion and of a purer morality; they offer a more becoming sacrifice to the great Power, the universal Spirit, the infinite Intelligence, in which we live, and move, and have our being; and looking around on the world, and seeing prospects fairer than preternatural prophecy has promised, or than its agency can realise, it teaches us to hail the dawning of a day whose brightness shall bring the world enduring joy and gladness, peace and love, and interminable improvement.

LECTURE IX.

On the Development of the Religious Ideas as modified by other Causes.

Institutions, Character, and Events.

August 5th, 1849.

In the present course of lectures, supplementary to that I delivered here last autumn on the religious ideas, we have already considered those modifications of the development of the natural religion of humanity which are ascribable to idiosyncrasies of constitution in individuals or in races of mankind, to the influences of the material universe, to the effects of literature, of art, and of science; and there remain to be considered the modifications produced in such thoughts and ideas by events, institutions, and individual character. But these three influences—of events, institutions, and individual character—are better treated in conjunction than separately, because they in fact resolve themselves into the inquiry, What has been that species of influence on the development of the religious ideas which may be traced in the world's history? Events, institutions, and characters are the elements of history. Events, comparable to those great changes which the geologist traces in the physical history of the earth; institutions, which, though they have been abolished, yet leave their traces in thoughts, opinions, manners, like the fragments of ancient architecture—the remains of temples, towers, and palaces; and characters, which are the great bond that connects us with facts, —characters which have gained an abiding record in the state of human opinion and the progress of human thought,—characters which remain to us distinct and vivid, whilst the many have passed away into oblivion;—these, like the vestiges of the past, on which the antiquary bestows his toilsome research, to ascertain what were the modes of existence, the material operation, and the forms of the many species that have long passed nameless to their graves,

—these present themselves to us with something of the reality of living beings; they are indeed still spirits walking the earth, and exercising some degree of power over our own thoughts, feelings, and anticipations. I shall, therefore, instead of separating these, take the general subject—of the modifications of the religious ideas as they may be traced by the material which forms the substance of historical record.

History begins in the same way and with similar phenomena for all countries and for all races. There are certain common events belonging to the early condition of society—events which, if not specifically recorded, may yet be inferred from what we know of the laws of social progress. The individual becomes the family; families swell into tribes; tribes, by amalgamation or by conquest, become states; empire extends their influence over others of the human race. The book of Genesis is the universal history. Every nation has had an Abraham, its progenitor; a Moses, its former and lawgiver. They may have passed away unrecorded; but something similar to such characters as these belongs to all tribes, and, by belonging to all tribes, belongs also to all nations. Together with this natural progress of society, there is a natural progress in the growth of ideas which constitute the elements of their religions. The wandering head of a family like Abraham has a Deity that wanders also—who is the inhabitant of earth rather than of heaven—who is always at hand when his suppliant needs his aid—who comes and converses with him at the door of his tent, rests with him when he is stationary, travels with him when he is journeying. Thus it was with the Deity of the patriarchs, of whom such simple and interesting accounts are preserved in the book of Genesis; thus it was with them and with their God. The Deity was not then peculiarly present in some central abode, some splendid temple; but he went with them where they went—he abode with them where they abode. This mode of thought as to the Deity is nearly akin to that which the African savage still retains in his fetich worship. But as the family swells into a tribe or a number of tribes, their Deity becomes more extensively present, more grand in his majesty, more powerful in his operations. And when they swell yet more, when they become a nation with a fixed abode, with their provinces and their metropolis, then the Deity becomes their national Deity, the Lord of that people, honoured by them separately and individually in their abodes, honoured by them yet more splendidly in those central places of worship, their civic or national temples, to which they make their resort at appointed times for that purpose. And if they aggrandise themselves yet more, and conquer others, or believe in their own strength and future destiny to do so, then the Deity of the nation becomes the Deity of the whole earth, of the entire human race. Thus, as man grows in his social state—as his thoughts expand in that development which the advance of society renders inevitable—in that same way is he advancing towards a clearer conception of that thought of the Infinite which is darkly in his mind, and which, by these gradations, extends itself towards some better representation, makes some faint advance towards a proper Infinity.

The earth was once chiefly the scene of wandering tribes, and they had much in common. The general flow of migration was from the east. They all remembered some great leader who guided them forth; they all had the recollection of whatever catastrophe or event occurred anterior to their dispersion—of such an event as that deluge, for instance, which, though it might be most confined and only local in its devastations, yet would thus become the common inheritance of all as a tradition—which we find to have been the fact. And hence it is that, in almost all religions, we find a reverence for the east—undoubtedly the nest, if we may so speak, of the human race, whence it winged its way into all the various regions afterwards inhabited. We find in all religions and in all traditions—from those of the most polished and learned nations of antiquity even down to the savages of North America—traditions of a flood—of an overwhelming catastrophe, by which, at some early period, the human race had been visited. They all look back to a condition of comparative enjoyment before they felt so severely the destiny of toil; they all had their paradise, their gardens of bliss, their golden age. Whilst the leader, in most cases, became a representative or supposed incarnation of Divinity, so identified with God as sometimes to be undistinguishable in their worship and honour, and, by the peculiar features of his character, giving some peculiar tinge to the mode in which, in their mind, religion was developed.

There was thus always mingling with the influence of nature that which I have described, and which would vary according to the variety of the regions in which they fixed their abodes. There would be an intermingling of the influences of nature and of tradition; and thus would the character of their worship be varied. Geography with the ancients is genealogy—it is the tracing of the people up to some one family, to the children of some one child of a god or demigod. We find this universally. Their local demarcations are connected intimately with the origin of their tribe; the origin of their tribe points to some human modification of their thoughts of the Divine. And by this blending, stimulus was given to imagination; legends were perpetuated from generation to generation; human adventure mingled with the faint strugglings of abstract thought; and there was produced that tendency to idealise according to imaginative impulse as well as by rational inquiry which gives so diversified a character to the different religions of the human race. The spiritual clung to the actual for support. Spiritual thoughts, too weak and faint in that early and untrained condition of human nature to support themselves, sought relief in external realities—in the leaders of their tribes, in the events of their history; and thus there came that blending of religion with other matters by which it has ever been characterised, and by which, while essentially the same, it has modifications so infinitely diversified.

At length empire arose. Tribes were aggrandised into nations—nations with a fixed abode, perhaps, extending it by conquest. The various appliances which belong to combined man under powerful direction,—these formed empire; and empire forthwith endowed a priesthood. The establishment of a priesthood is a point in the history of human opinion of the utmost importance. At first, the priesthood was a caste, a sacred caste. It was thus in Egypt and in India; it was the supreme caste—above in fact, and sometimes in form also, even the inheritors of royalty. Only the warrior approached near it. Here was a band of men whose business it was to be conversant with the invisible as well as with the visible; a band of men who stood between their fellow creatures and the Divine, between this world and the next; and the immediate result of this, especially in Egypt, was an amazing accumulation of knowledge. The Egyptian priesthood had all the power of society at its command; it had all the force that government could give, and that greater force which opinion and reverence bestow. Those priests knew all that in their day was to be known, and vastly more than any other men in their time had the remotest conception of. They watched the movements of the stars, they tied together the constellations, they tracked the course of the sun through the signs of the zodiac. They were not less familiar with earth. They knew the properties of almost every plant that grew. They had their agents, who could bring them whatever observations they could make in their own country or in distant countries. They were continually observing nature's experiments, and making their own experiments. They had opportunities for acquiring an intimate knowledge, not merely of the material universe and its varied phenomena, but of human nature. By the reverence in which they were held, this microcosm was laid open to their searching gaze. They were the physicians and the spiritual pastors and the moral lawgivers of humanity as it existed around them; and thus they came to know what was in man. They had their opportunities for retired thought, as well as for the accumulation of facts and observations. In the deep recesses of their temples they could shut out the world, and call into exercise all the strongest powers of the reflective faculties. They could meditate on the enigma of human life in the presence of the sphynxes. They were admitted to that "holiest of holies," in which stood "Isis, the veiled." None had opportunities like them for penetrating into the meaning and the mystery of all things; and, accordingly, the fact is, that the profoundest speculations of modern times, whatever we may reason on,—foreknowledge, free-will, and fate, and the deepest and darkest of abstract subjects, —that almost all these speculations were, to a certain extent, anticipated by the priests of Egypt. Theirs was a knowledge which, one would at first imagine, might have aided, in the grandest and most rapid manner, the development of the religious ideas which are common to human nature. But it was not so. For the extreme of knowledge coexisted with extreme ignorance. This was, after all, but a lamp in a sepulchre; it was a light, not shining in a dark place, but restricted and confined by surrounding darkness. Whilst they had only thought for their occupation, the occupations of mankind generally about them left no means of thought, gave no strength to intellect, but kept them in the condition of poor, partial, misguided recipients. The priesthood was immediately surrounded with all the temptations that cluster themselves about power of the very highest kind, and responsibility of the very feeblest character,—if, indeed, it can be said to have existed at all. Of course they presumed on this. Ignorance took their emblems literally. If they depicted the Divine attributes by animal or vegetable forms, the multitude regarded those forms as the absolute and ultimate object of their worship; and the blunder was too tempting not to be taken advantage of; the cheat was too easy of gratification, too immediate, for a priesthood so circumstanced to resist it: and accordingly they sacrificed the moral to the ceremonial, the spiritual to the visible. Then they became oracular and miraculous; they gave forth responses as to the fates of mankind—of which they would foresee, by their means and opportunities, and the long record which they possessed, more than others —as though they were speaking the unerring word of omniscience; and the arts and transformations and wonders with which they had become acquainted in their researches into the secrets of nature, served to impress the public mind with their possession of preternatural powers. And so the class, in Egypt and in India, became the supreme class,—possessed all that the country could furnish of luxury, laid its grasp upon the land of the country and upon the toil of its inhabitants, asserted for itself a supremacy to which it would have had a better title had beneficence dictated the means of raising the great mass of their fellow-beings somewhat nearer to their own elevation.

But amongst those Egyptian priests there was yet an inner circle of men whose thoughts went beyond their fellows. It was, in all probability, amongst them that the conception of a spiritual and infinite Deity first assumed distinctness. It was probably amongst them that the outlines of a religion worthy of the reason of universal man first shaped themselves. But the position of this class had formed a restraining power; they had made bigots and persecutors of the people, and of unworthy members of their own class: fear would begin its operation upon them; they would associate together in secret, those who had arrived at the higher degrees of knowledge, and keep it from others, as the rest of their caste kept so much knowledge of a subordinate nature from the great body of the community. It was, no doubt, amongst the temples and pyramids of Egypt that the Grecian mysteries originated,—that the practice began of an exclusive bond between those who, knowing more than others, did not regard knowledge as by right the universal heritage of man. And what was the result? The evil tendencies, the abuses growing naturally from the establishment of a priesthood, enfeebled the nations both of Egypt and India, rendered them the easy prey of any invader that chose to fix upon them his gaze and mark them out for the purposes of conquest. Whilst both became enslaved, degraded, enfeebled as nations, the priesthood itself sank towards the ignorance which it had kept up in the community around.

Of this priesthood Moses was a member. In all its wisdom he was nurtured. Though a Hebrew by birth, he became an Egyptian priest by training and by office; and with the indications of his mind and character derivable from the subsequent record, we may presume that he was amongst those who penetrated the deepest into spiritual mysteries, and who obtained the most of spiritual light. The grand peculiarity of Moses, then, and that which gives him so conspicuous a place in the history of opinion, is this,—that, breaking off from the secrecy of the Egyptian priesthood, by abjuring the doctrine of one degree of knowledge for the exclusive few, and of a lower degree for the people at large, he proclaimed freely and fearlessly to the children of Israel the inner doctrines, the hidden mysteries, of the Egyptian priesthood, especially that fundamental one of the unity and spirituality of the Divine nature. Here, then, was a link between an old form of opinion and a new one. Here was a change produced by individual character, corrective of much of the error which had resulted from the former change produced by institution.

Thus the aberrations into which humanity was led by the sacerdotal class were corrected by the truthfulness of the spirit of Moses, and by the basis which he endeavoured to lay of a nation of priests, of a community all whose members should know whatever was to be known of God and Providence and the destinies of human nature. The former stage was necessary to the subsequent one. It was by being thus previously instructed, that Moses became qualified to be the Jewish leader and legislator. The learning in the cell was preparatory to the proclamation on Sinai, and so was the plan matured and the proper agency formed for that grand announcement, the monotheism of the Jews. But for the destruction of the pursuing Egyptian host in the Red Sea, that proclamation on Sinai could not have been made. But for the previous oppression of the Jews, the state of toilsome and degraded slavery into which they had been crushed, there would have been no such resistance, no such emigration as that of the Jews from Egypt. But for the previous state of the sacerdotal caste in Egypt, there could have been no such training as that which Moses underwent, nor any circumstance so peculiar as that of his being at once a Hebrew by birth, and yet learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. But for the sale of Joseph into Egypt, the family of Abraham, and the tribes into which it grew, would not have abode there, nor have needed this deliverance, nor have been the subjects of this previous oppression. And thus we may trace a chain of causes and effects from this great resting-place of the proclamation of monotheism, which leads us back, not only to the wanderings of Abraham or the sovereignty of the Pharaohs, but back to the first overflowings of the Nile, back to the first struggles of elemental and atomic life in their organic and enduring forms. This is what we call Providence. We see here a guiding hand conducting humanity; and in the development of human thought with regard to the Divinity we find indications of the agency and the operation of that Divinity.

Thought! Who can tell what best nourishes, or what most formidably suppresses it? We look back, after long ages, and we see the outline of plan and result; and we joyfully anticipate for humanity a further progress. But this could not have been visible at the time; the struggling elements were then only endeavouring to gain their appropriate positions, and to complete the great form which was to result from their combination. We see a result which, after all, is rather on the surface; and, with faith in humanity, we know that, while this superficial view is one which displays wisdom, power, and goodness, there must have been very much indeed under this of which we cannot judge from the mere outward indications that remain. In Jews and in Egyptians there must have been thoughts, feelings, aspirations, ill expressed by the outer forms of their religious ceremonial. They had the human affections in them. These may have been slaves, those may have been tyrants; they still were both human. There are occasional touches, glimpses in the narrative, which go at once to the heart, and impress this persuasion on the mind. We still see the watching mother of the Hebrew infant as she committed her babe, in his bulrush ark, to the waters of the Nile; we still sympathise in the events of that strange, romantic history of the patriarch Joseph; and we know that, not only in these, but in other races whose doings are recorded in the narrative, there must have been what makes our nature a true, a good, a grand, and a beautiful thing. They had their affections, their hopes, their fears. The ignorant idolatry of the one, and what often proved the fierce monotheism of the other, could not suppress these, could not supersede them. Those elements of power remain to give the religious ideas in subsequent ages a yet greater development than was afforded by this chain of events and character, striking as it is even to our contemplation; for, while forms, and creeds, and ceremonials change, hope, and truth, and love, and joy are everlasting in humanity.

LECTURE X.

On the Development of the Religious Ideas as modified by other Causes.

Institutions, Character, and Events (*continued*).

August 19*th*, 1849.

In this subsidiary course of lectures to that on the religious ideas,—for subsidiary and illustrative of that course I have intended the present one to be,—we have now arrived at the tenth upon the causes and influences which have modified the development of those religious ideas. The last topic which I meant to include in this series was commenced in the lecture delivered a fortnight ago, and relates to the influence exercised upon religious thought by institutions, individual character, and public events. And with a few additional remarks on this final topic, I intend to bring the course to a conclusion,—certainly not because it is exhausted, for its exhaustion would require years,—but because even the merest outline requires more diligent and prolonged preparation, and more consecutive attention, than can be given to it, either by me or by yourselves, in present circumstances. I have, therefore, only now to make a few remarks on the effect of institutions, character, and events on the development of the religious ideas. But in calling this a final subject, one cannot but feel that its announcement should rather be of a commencement than a conclusion. For what a gigantic subject it is! It involves a philosophical view of the entire history of religious thought and opinion in the human race. To do it justice, what a diversity of topics must have been, not merely glanced at, but considered and illustrated! How much does it comprise,—what laws, establishments, revelations, reforms, philosophisings! How many realities becoming mere forms,—how many forms in turn growing up and generating a sort of realities! What diversity of deities, and what diversity of worship! What interference with the course of thought by the discoveries of science, by the advances of conquest, by the arts of politicians! What persecutions endured, and what persecutions inflicted! What different conceptions of the Divine, and what different modes of expressing that conception, and embodying it so as to render the homage of man to his Maker! What elevation of heroes into gods, and what abolition of gods whose temples once stood the loftiest, and whose altars once blazed the brightest! To trace all this would seem to require the pen of that recording angel who prepares the volume at whose opening humanity shall be judged. It would comprise the annals of the human race; it would be the history of the genius of humanity. The merest outline of such a subject would seem to require the study of a life. Very briefly and imperfectly must it now be dismissed.

Of institutions something has been already said in the last lecture,—at least, of that first and most important of institutions as acting upon the development of the religious ideas, the institution of a priesthood. But it was chiefly the dark side of the subject to which I had occasion then to advert: and it ought not to be left there. There is something in the institution, and in the characters connected with it, which should also suggest thoughts of a different kind, and to be regarded with far greater complacency. The great observers of humanity, the philosophical poets, have always seen this. How many of them have not delighted in the idealisation of the priestly character! You will find it in some of the most beautiful episodes of Chaucer, of Dryden, and of Shakespeare. The man who walks humbly with his God, and lovingly with his fellow-creatures,—who is ever seeking out ignorance, that he may enlighten it; calamity, that he may console it; trial and struggle and aspiration, that he may strengthen the moral combatant,—who abjures only the grossness and the vileness of this world,—who identifies himself with all in it that is true and gentle, good and hopeful,—whose spirit is at once in heaven in the bosom of the Father, and on earth ministering to his brethren,—and whose calm and unobtrusive life is, in that very quietness, but like the silent fountain, which in the flowing of its waters quietly communicates fertility, and gives freshness and life and beauty to all earth's products;—such is the picture viewed in one direction, and capable of endearing itself to the heart of man, whilst it stimulates for its description the powers of his imagination. But no beauty of character, no lowliness and loveliness of conduct, can redeem the institution of a priesthood,—especially when it is instituted with political connections and relations. It may, for the time, have a beneficial effect; it may prevent the obliteration of the religious ideas from all social expression; it may scatter something of the dense and dark cloud of ignorance which would brood over the utterly untaught; it may prevent superstition and fanaticism from ranging abroad in all their gloom and their terrors; but if there be such results as these, we must not at the same time forget that, whilst it saves from some species of degradation, it is inimical to progress,—it endeavours to fix and limit that which cannot be fixed and limited. And if, in the earlier states of social advance, if in the earlier forms of civilisation, it may exercise some restrictive power over evil influences, it too soon becomes opposed to whatever is good, enlarged, and progressive. Religious ideas, when embodied in creeds and forms, become petrified; they cease to have any spirit of life in them; they remain but as monuments of the past and warnings as to the future. In our own country, for instance, where we have an established Church and an established clergy, it may be that there has been not so much wild fanaticism as, perhaps, might have otherwise existed; it may be—and it no doubt is and has been—that some sects will exhibit a purer form, others a coarser and lower form, than the religion thus enshrined and supported; some sects will be better, and some worse, than an establishment;—but the great complaint against it is, that it stops the progress of the human mind, denies the rights of intellect, and forbids religion to advance, as it ought to advance, with the progress of thought and with the discoveries of science.

Political institutions have acted on the development of the religious ideas in conformity with their character as political institutions,—the good for good, and the evil for evil. The institution of slavery, for instance, travesties religion. It insults the very name; it divides brethren upon earth, and robs the Deity of his glorious character as the universal and impartial Father of his creatures.

Grecian freedom avoided much of the depressing and degrading character which belonged to religion under the oriental despotisms. By not having a permanent priesthood, it gave the philosophical spirit more freedom; a larger field was opened for the exercise of thought, and more facilities for advancement. It gave fancy and grace to men's conceptions; and if the advance of human knowledge did not at that time allow to the great majority the higher modes and forms of truth, it allowed them to some few. Despotism, seeking to quell the strivings of thought, has, in one remarkable instance, tolerated freedom as to religion, while forbidding it in political and social matters. For almost all the light which of late ages has been cast upon theological subjects, we are indebted to that freedom of the German universities which the rulers have allowed, as a sort of safety-valve to mind, by which its powers might escape, and be prevented from any exertion of explosive force upon those institutions which such governments have cherished and looked to as their main support. But, even here, how remarkably have the power and tendency of mind been exhibited! The works had scarcely issued from the press which told us that education in the Prussian and German States was but of little avail as to making men feel, think, and act like citizens and members of a community, when those who had previously been subjected to this taunt of being educated slaves, showed that mind, once informed and trained, could and would appreciate the right, and assert it even to the death.

Within these limits, therefore, and with this checkered interchange of good and evil, which belongs, as we have had occasion to see, to almost all, or even to all, the modifying causes which act on the development of the religious ideas, —to these we must allow an operation for good in the earlier conditions of society, interchanged with an operation for evil when it has begun to make any permanent and marked progress. They have their season of usefulness,—not a very long one, nor, to the future destinies of the world, an important one, unless that importance be derived from their restrictive power. They are like the thorny fence with which very often the sapling oak is encircled: it may for a time be its protection; it may preserve it from injury and destruction, perhaps; but the season soon comes in which it is not needed, in which it is only an incumbrance and a nuisance; when it should be torn away, and thrown to the fire or to the wind; whilst the tree strikes deeper its roots, enlarges its stem, and throws abroad high in the air its spreading branches.

If institutions have acted on the development of the religious ideas, so have individual characters. It would be a long and not an uninteresting task to trace all we can trace of the individual minds who have left their impress on human modes of thinking in relation to this subject. That august figure which closes the theological retrospect,—so long from our times to his,—the mighty form of Moses, "the man of God,"—what a long shadow has it cast upon the world,—how deep and broad is it at this day! How did his spirit revive in a long line of prophets, rightly described as "like unto him"! How did it animate those who checked the aberrations of the Jewish priesthood, and maintained the purity of the institution matured in the wilderness! How it preserved the nation in its entire distinctness, whatever its relations with other powers, and whatever their religious forms, whether the gross idolatry of the Canaanites, or the comparative purity of the Persians and Babylonians! Moses, it might not only be said in the apostles' times, "is preached at this day in every synagogue," but he is still preached, obeyed, and observed in the religious forms of a race true to its primeval mission. It was the spirit of Moses that anchored the Christian Church to monotheism, when its tendencies, by the introduction of the doctrine of the Trinity, and the worship of angels and saints, were fast exhibiting themselves as approximating to polytheism; and it was again the voice of Moses which spake in that of Mahomet, when he commanded his countless millions of followers to hold fast to the Divine unity.

And if we find one great element even of modern religion in these remote Jewish times, we find another element also of modern religion in a different region, and of a different race. For, wherever there has been the tendency to abstract and elevate man's contemplations on the Divinity and on things divine,—wherever there has been the attempt to unite reason in its most vigorous exercise with faith in its most adoring tendencies,—wherever there has been an appreciation of that speculation which, seeming mystical, yet has in its mysticism so many beams of light and life, enshrouded, but still darting forth upon the earth,—there has the name of Plato,—or, if not his name, even if that were unknown,—there has the influence of his speculations been at work, mingling themselves with what was founded not only upon philosophy, but upon revelation,—mingling themselves with the contemplations of the votaries of creeds that bore a different name, and perhaps taught hostility to the ideas which were so strong in him, and which remain part and parcel of the religious spirit wherever it is best exemplified. Then the Apostle Paul stands at the head of an army of martyrs, of confessors, of missionaries, of dogmatists,—the founder of the Christian creeds of later times, the first organiser of churches, the ordainer of bishops,—the apostle, according to himself, of a greater than himself, but in fact giving the power and impress of his own mind to the religion which he did so much towards establishing in the world.

And if we come to a later period, how many names are there in our own country of men whose peculiar modes of thought have given a peculiar tinge to the religion of vast bodies, sectarian or established! How many have there been who, in the reforming spirit, have looked to John Knox, or to Calvin his master; how many of those who have learned to compromise in religion, and to study its outward decencies and its alliances with the gradations of society,—thus following the course of Cranmer; or how many, in their onward struggles, have felt deeply that this life was a pilgrimage, and have trodden onward in their course, feeling that it had been traced for them, and the end of all shown as in a map, in the allegory of Bunyan! How many voices have adored their God in the language of Watts and of Doddridge! Thousands, millions of elements mingle to make up the religious thoughts, and to give the peculiar colour and character to the religious ideas, as they are developed in different minds. The highest and most powerful of all is that derived from him who, being the Son of God, was the brother of mankind; who brought religion home to every human feeling; who mixed it with all the relations and all the objects of life; and who, by the simplicity and the pathos of his parables, and the terseness of his precepts, made himself the lord of conscience in innumerable minds.

If, in tracing the influence of character, we often find that it has darkened as well as illustrated, enfeebled as well as strengthened,—that some great men have made the religion of multitudes after them either vindictive or superstitious and formal,—still there is this advantage, that in the long course of time, and in the growing development of the moral sense, the characters we venerate become more pure and elevated in our appreciation. Men have first deified those whom they worshiped; they have invested and endowed them with divine attributes before they rendered to them divine honours. In looking back to the intellectual, moral, and religious leaders of the human race, we look through a perspective too long for us to preserve the sharp outline of what it is possible they actually were. The distance softens angularities and abruptnesses; we venerate them as the great and the good; and we thus throw back upon them our own improved conceptions of what constitute the great and the good. They are idealised to us; they are surrounded with a halo of loveliness which makes them worthy of the veneration we render to their names and memories; and thus an influencing cause on the development of the religious ideas, which may for a time work unhappily, which might, in estimating it, appear to have only a limited and depressing tendency, in time becomes a source of good, unmixed and enduring.

In adverting to a few of the most remarkable events that have acted as influencing causes in this process, we need go no further back than to the conquests of the Roman people,—that people formed for conquest and command, endowed with such wonderful powers of overwhelming other nations, and then of reorganising them. Who can doubt that most important results in the history of thought, of religious thought, must be traced to that series of conquests which built up the Roman empire? The world was thus prepared for a common religion, for the rapid progress of a new faith, provided that faith had within itself recommendations to human credence and complacency. The world was one under Rome,—one and at peace; its idolatries were a creed outworn; and its scepticism, the only thing which then checked its mythology, was low, licentious, and debasing. The world was ripe for a new faith, simple, comparatively rational, living, congenial with human thoughts and the human heart; and Christianity came, and spread like lightning to the ends of the Roman world.

That great event which next followed in the world's changes,—the invasion of the barbarian hordes, the subjugation of the south by the north,—had its effect in giving religious thought a firmer and a steadier tendency. It made man more deeply reflective, and led him in religion to look from the external to the internal. If it spread for a time too much of gloom over religious thought, this was amply recompensed by its more enduring, its more nervous and manly character. If the barbarian tribes overwhelmed the Roman empire like a deluge, still its ancient civilisation was not destroyed. The monasteries preserved it; their towers rose above the waters of that deluge; and thought and learning had a refuge there, until they could extend themselves over the great mass of society.

The Crusades had a remarkable influence. The Christian world,—that is, the then Roman-Catholic world,—wrapped up in itself, in its own priesthood, its own dogmas, its own churches and forms,—needed the expansion and the tinge of oriental fancy; it needed the sense of beauty and elegance in the arts of life, and also in the tendencies of the human mind, which could only then be derived from that degree of communication which, with all their hostility, took place between the invaders and the invaded. If Europe was then hurled upon Asia in one great warlike mass, Europe receded back from Asia with much more of gentleness and charity, with more of just appreciation for religionists of a different class, with a greater feeling of the beauties that may be scattered over even a gloomy theology, than could ever otherwise have been realised.

And then came the revival of ancient literature, when not only were the admirers of ancient learning "to the enlightened love of ancient freedom warmed," but when also the powers of thought, never so developed as in the philosophers of Greece, claimed their place in the education of modern Europe, claimed their influence on the minds of the best thinkers of modern Europe, claimed their due supremacy, received the world's mental homage, and prepared Europe for the Reformation.

After all this came the invention of printing, which, if it did not throw down, yet began the demolition of the barrier between the literate and the illiterate,—which declared that all this should be for the world,—that, eventually, whatever great men had realised, all men should possess,—that if others had laboured, we should enter into their labours, and possess them as a joyful heritage. The press, whose powers are yet but very partially developed, has begun its great work, the work of centuries, and is proceeding to bring the universal human mind to bear upon those religious ideas which are the grandest conceptions of the human mind. Its discovery was the voice of God saying, "Let there be light;"—and there shall be light.

We have, then, a firm foundation for faith in the wisdom and beneficent tendency of laws which have been operating ever since man existed on the earth. We find, that in the influences which have acted on the development of the religious ideas, there has been always a preponderance of good over evil; that the evil has been transient, and the good enduring; that institutions irreconcilable with the freedom and progress of the human mind are doomed to crumble away; that even the members of those institutions, though enjoying their privileges, cannot resist the effect of increasing light upon their own minds, so that the very Brahmins in India of to-day are not what the Brahmins of India were a few generations back. Knowledge, even when thus made a monopoly, acts with its liberalising tendencies, and becomes continually less and less capable of being monopolised. We may exercise a firm faith in the progress of the true and the good, and be hopeful that as, by the communications of philosophical research and scientific discovery, that development has gone on more rapidly in later times, it will go on in an increasing ratio, and cause humanity to advance the more swiftly the further it has proceeded. Nor in its tendencies should we forget that charity, greater than faith and hope, which is the crowning result of religion, as to the relations of the human mind with other minds,—which teaches us how much the evil in the world has been unconscious on the part of its authors,—how much of the true and the good is to be found under all forms and diversities,—how the ideas which are native to the human mind, like the fruits which are native to the earth, minister to man's support and strength, to his progress, to the development and full maturity of his powers, and to social as well as to individual progress. Progress in both is the great law which we find in harmony with the religious ideas themselves, and with the history and the just appreciation of the causes which have acted upon their development; that progress which, in the individual, may make a spirit resemble one toiling up Jacob's ladder towards heaven, and which, in society, shows us the genius of the human race holding on a steady march towards the full maturity of good and knowledge, which shall approve man verily and indeed the child of God and the inheritor of his Father's blessing.

ON

OBJECTIONS TO "THE RELIGIOUS IDEAS."

LECTURE I.

ON SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY.

November 4th, 1849.

IN the volume of lectures recently published on the Religious Ideas, I have endeavoured to give a plain statement of those views of religion, considered in the broadest and most general sense, which my own mind entertains, and to which I desire to call the serious and earnest attention of others. Statement was the chief thing at which, in the circumstances, I could aim,—presenting rather thoughts which had familiarised themselves and enrooted themselves, as it were, in my mind, and inviting to the contemplation of them. It was not to be expected that such views could be put forth without exciting objection in various quarters. Such, accordingly, has been the case; and it is now my purpose that the continuous services in which, with little interruption, I hope to engage here till the conclusion of the year, should be directed towards such notice as those objections may require. Not that I shall propose, in any case—or if I do, it will be the exception—to attempt to grapple controversially with any objector. For the conviction of my own mind has long been that meditation and reflection are a much surer course towards religious truth than controversy. Towards those views my own mind has long been tending, and in them it rests. I believe them to contain their own chief arguments, and to commend themselves more by their accordance with the best feelings and aspirations of our minds, than by any logical array of proof of their truth, or disproof of objections against them, which could be made. However, the objections, in various cases, suggest topics in themselves of interest, as well as tending to the further elucidation of the views which have thus been put forth; and such topics will in succession, therefore, be brought before you. To one, in the first instance, I shall advert,—namely, the allegation that, in these lectures, no system of theology is put forth; that systems are—indirectly at least, and incidentally—assailed, but that no antagonist system, with all its array of proofs and inferences, is set up in their stead. Systematic theology, its propriety and its tendencies, will therefore be the subject of the present lecture, and probably of one or two that will follow.

The inculcation of systematic theology is the great aim of what is called religious instruction, whether that instruction be ministered to the young or to the mature. Systematic theology is, with some, the first requisite even of infantile training. Children are catechised into it; adults are sermonised into it. It is the alpha and the omega of modern religion. Nay, it is made to precede inquiry; and not only those who are merely to learn have an entire system of theology presented to them in elementary forms and books, but those who are to be teachers begin their course where one would much more naturally expect it to finish,—with subscription to an entire theological code, to a whole system of doctrine, to which they are regarded as pledged for the remainder of their lives, whatever may be the result of their studies or of their maturer thoughts. System is looked to as religion. Now, whatever may be the objections or difficulties which I may feel as to existing systems, I certainly feel quite as strong an objection and a difficulty as to there being any system at all on such a matter as this. I do not think the time is yet ripe for it; I do not think the human mind is yet ripe for it. I believe it to be a matter which belongs—if ever it shall be practicable in this world at all—to some day which is still far distant. We have the materials, it may be; but what have we more? It was this thought which induced me to take these separate religious ideas, and to treat them as we treat great realities in the world of science, of observation, and of experience. If by a system it is merely meant indeed that our thoughts should be arranged in some order,—that the ideas which we contemplate, and the relations among those ideas, should influence our minds as to the succession in which they are brought under our own attention, or are submitted to the attention of others,—to this there can be little objection. If system be mere arrangement and order, such a thing as this I shall probably attempt, before these lectures be concluded, in reference to the religious ideas, and endeavour to give some form, some arrangement and order, to what may, in this point of view, be called the doctrines, the duties, the devotion of the religion of humanity.

But then this operation I take to be altogether individual and provisional. Where the facts are the most imperfect which constitute the elements of a future science, we may yet throw them, by some principle, into some degree of order; we may make the most of what little knowledge we possess; and we may rest satisfied that in so doing we provide an agency that may conduce to the further expansion of our minds and the further enrichment of our intelligence. But we can only do this with reference to what further knowledge may achieve. We must always have a reservation in our minds as to the effects which may result from yet higher degrees of light than those of which we are now possessed. We do it, I say, provisionally and individually. We may do it for ourselves; we cannot do it for others. The religious ideas have different associations, different bearings, are seen in different lights—both as to their own nature and their mutual relations—by different individual minds. Where these are diversified by any strongly marked characteristics, the same original materials will not be placed in the same order, will not be viewed in the same connection. We may arrange for ourselves; we cannot arrange for another mind: that mind must do its own proper work. Whatever be the authority on which such arrangement is propounded to it, it must do its own proper work, or the work will be left undone altogether, as to any practical or desirable result. We cannot do it for others; it is useless to bring to them our ready-made, cut-and-dried theological systems, which they are to receive or reject. We cannot do it; if not for an individual mind, still less for multitudes. We cannot do it for a nation; we cannot do it for posterity. It must be the work of each generation for itself, as it is originally of each individual for himself.

The diversity of such associations is evident, if we look at the religious ideas as we look at other ideas. See how varied they are. The circumstances of time, of country, of political and social condition, of individual mental character,—these are diversities which, in the aggregate, have made the great difference of religions in the world, as they have made the great difference of literature in the world. So that, perhaps, there is no nation that has produced a literature equally intelligible, productive of equal interest, equally open in what is minute as well as in what is grand, to the mental appreciation of the people of another country. The idiosyncrasies of race, of language, of nation, have this effect both in literature and in religion. Let us do, then, humbly and becomingly our own work, and leave others to do their work. Let us proceed with caution where it is evident that we possess the great and grand materials, but where it is equally evident that we have not as yet either the complete possession, the power, or the skill to combine them into a theological system, which shall set forth to the world, in their fulness and extent, the relations of the Infinite with the finite, of the Creator with the creation.

For let any traveller visit those wondrous old ruins, say of the eastern world, and stand amongst the wrecks and remnants of Tadmor's marble waste; let him look around on what once was Palmyra,—here the standing fragment of a portalled temple in ruins, its shape, its plan, its elevation undistinguishable; there a fallen pillar, pedestals without statues, statues without pedestals; an accumulation of confusion, amidst which there is yet the mark of beauty, of grandeur, of order, once so distinctly visible, —the signs of human life, of human power and genius. How few are the travellers that would ever dream of what in such a case would be justly deemed the presumption—from these indications, these partly seen and partly obscured architectural ideas, so to speak—to restore the building, to trace accurately the plan, to say what relation each portion bore to the rest, how the whole was ordered and harmonised! The most sagacious traveller will generally be the first to confess his incapacity for such a task. And is the plan of the world more visible,—that world which some contend is as great a ruin as Palmyra itself,—which if, in the opinion of others, it be not a ruin, has yet a progressive existence, and is only revealed to us by fitful glimpses? Shall we pretend to do that with the Infinite Architect of suns, worlds, and systems, which we cannot do with the architecture of the royal creator of a city that has fallen into ruins? Or, to take a homelier illustration,—take one unskilled in mechanics, unacquainted with the arts of fabricating different substances, which have brought so much of honour and of wealth too to our country,—put a stranger to the mechanical arts into a manufactory, with all its complicated machinery, its moving wheels, its mysterious powers, its apparently unlimited combinations;—what can result but bewilderment, except to those whom years of study and of skill have trained to the comprehension of the whole? And, again I ask, is the workmanship of the universe more easy to be understood than that of a cotton factory? Humility becomes us, and especially when there is this sort of presumption in the dictating of systems and plans, in the formation of what pretends to be a complete theological system, which yet merely revives a bygone past. The law of humanity is progress; it is not its doom or destiny to live in the bygone past. What do your systems do for us,—those systems into which you would cast, as into a mould, the mind of a child, destined to be the future man, and, as we trust, the future immortal? What is the result and tendency of the prevalent theological systems of this country? To perpetuate the notions of the sixteenth century; to make the man of that day live again in our thoughts, our feelings, our aspirations; to bound our hopes by his hopes; to regulate our thoughts by his thoughts; to guide our actions by his creed or his precepts, received as divine. Curious task this, to make the man of the sixteenth century live again in the nineteenth! Are we brought into being for nothing more or nothing better than this? Do the ages so soon fulfil their cycle, and lead us back to that point of the circle from which the human race, centuries ago, commenced its career? The art of systematising, in the sixteenth century, might be to those who embarked in such a plan a real or a factitious necessity; it was for themselves that they ought to have wrought; and the business of each succeeding century is to judge for itself, and to see how far its predecessors have accurately delineated the objects of which we have physical or spiritual perception.

Or we may take another illustration from the science of astronomy. The sun, the moon, the planetary bodies, in their regularity, and the eccentric comets in their course, the satellites so near, the fixed stars so distant and remote,—on these mankind have gazed from age to age; they have been to them like those religious ideas, which I have endeavoured to show thus rise and shine on the mind, as do the heavenly bodies on our corporeal sight. But where would the world have been if, from an early period, it had been insisted upon that every child should be taught, and every professed teacher be sworn to preach, an astronomical system? Mankind for some time felt, and wisely felt, that the time was not come, and that knowledge was not ripe, for any attempt at systematising in astronomy. However, they did begin, and they systematised after their manner. While the clearer views of Copernicus were, from time to time, seen fitfully by the world, those of the Ptolemaic system long held sway, scribbling the sphere over, as Milton says,

> "With cycle and epicycle,—orb on orb."

Then came Tycho Brahe, with a sort of compromised system, like many theological plans, which seek to reconcile conflicting extremes; and then came the Newtonian discoveries, and the poet sang:

> "Nature and nature's laws lay hid in night;
> God said, 'Let Newton be,' and all was light!"

Not quite all; for there were still errors to be corrected, and wondrous discoveries to be made; new planets were to be found in the heavens; new phenomena were to be investigated. When the great work of La Place appeared, it was then again declared that astronomy exhibited the phenomenon of a completed science; and yet upon that completion how much, up to our own days, up to the very passing year, has been superinduced! Absolute systematising there is none, even for the physical science which is most within our reach as to such a process: much less can it be so with theological knowledge, with the Unseen, with the Infinite, with the Eternal. In this our business is to inquire, to learn, to store up thankfully whatever knowledge we obtain, but not to affect to have all knowledge, and still less to pretend to impose the results of our own minds upon the minds and consciences of others.

There is no help which can aid us in the formation of a complete theological system. There is no sacred book about which interpreters will not differ, and that most widely, so as to elicit from it antagonistic doctrines. There are no minds so capacious and powerful, and so evidently under Divine illumination, and so invested with Divine sanction, as to warrant our implicitly following them. And if there were, the feebleness in ourselves would be a sufficient barrier. If the Athanasian Creed were true, that creed would be not the less a mystery—mere words—to the great majority who are taught to repeat it. It has been by a long process that that degree of clearness which we possess, as to the great and leading religious ideas, has been attained by the world. Dimly seen at first, they have become more and more plain, in consequence of their affinity with the dictates of our intellectual and moral constitution. But this has been the result of many ages; and ages more have work to do upon mankind of a similar description. Why, the Jews could not arrive at what may seem to us, at times, almost an elementary conception of the theological system, —that of eternity. The Jewish mind had not the notion of a proper and absolute eternity. There is no such word as "eternity" in the Jewish and Christian scriptures. "Ages of ages" is the furthest that they could get. And if, in this instance, what is deemed the very source of revealed truth leaves us so short of what the mind has attained to in its conceptions, where are the aids, where the helps, by which we may feel ourselves warranted, with all our weakness and infirmities, in the construction of an entire theological system?

"Inquirer," as I said before, is the proper name of man. And why should man be dissatisfied with such a name? If we have to await the great change for knowing the secrets of the invisible world, what must previous life be? If Death be indeed—as I think he is rightly called—the great teacher in such matters, we must wait his advent before we pretend to have attained the higher lessons of the school. If death be instruction, life must be inquiry. It is so in the sciences. What are we in all,—even the most simple and those most level to the application of our instruments, and most within the grasp of our calculations? Why, the whole human race is still but in a course of inquiry; its most enlightened minds are in such a course.

Let a Socrates arise amongst the heathen; he, face to face with death, yet speaks as one who is only speculating and desiring a clearer insight into what is beyond death. Take one in the full blaze of revelation, and with a heart so pure, a life so holy and devoted, and a mind so large, that he might best appreciate the authority of such a dispensation, —take such a man as Milton; and what does his posthumous work on theology show? What, but that "Inquirer" was his name, even to his latest day,—inquiry the course which he pursued when all his faculties were in their meridian; the course which, when the physical light was denied to his visual orbs, and he hoped that that "inner light" would beam more brightly upon his soul, he was still pursuing, and which he no doubt pursued to his latest day. Our philosophy, physical or moral, can boast no more than this,—that man is still to go on inquiring, learning; and much more is this to be the case in religion. Offer us a system which shall imply a knowledge of the Deity! Let man understand the daisy first, and give us a distinct account of all its qualities, its nature, and its relations.

It is the condition of inquirer that best becomes, best harmonises with our relations to the universe and to the Deity. We are the finite, labouring to make some little approach—but little at the most—towards the Infinite. We feel and grope our way, as it were, rejoicing that there is light enough for the purposes of encouragement, of consolation, of strength, and of hope; but not dreaming to anticipate the time when we "shall see as we are seen, and know as we are known." This is not our position; we are in the outer court as yet. Truth comprises the things of all worlds, of all ages; and what are threescore years and ten to grapple with it, to attain the mastery of it, or to form a title for imposing prescribed forms of it upon the minds of others? We are in the portal of the temple; glimpses of light come to us, at times, fitfully from within; and sounds of harmony, by snatches, reach our ears. But no more; the holy of holies is not yet open. Our business, our duty, our wisdom, is to wait and watch.

And in doing so, there will be, at the same time, that exercise of faith which is the inevitable result of having even glimpses of laws working out good and insuring progress. We cannot but rely on a Power of which we see so much that is trustworthy, and so attractive of trust. We cannot but exercise faith and hope,—I should think much more naturally and wholesomely than if we pretended to rely on a system which may give way. For what systems have not broken down with their believers? What theological systems ever held since the world began, and however varied, have proved enduring? and then, where are their votaries? All afloat upon a tempestuous ocean, without any thing to guide them. It is their own affectation of light, their premature assumption, that makes the darkness so intense. Warned by the mistake of such, we have, I think, abundance of consolation. Though we pretend to form no distinct, complete, coherent, and perfect system, we have reasons enough to prompt those feelings which become us towards God and man,—devotion to the one, and affection to the other. We have enough to guide us till we rest in peace, and attain to satisfaction, to the thankful enjoyment of good, to the calm contemplation of evil, and to the assured hope of future deliverance.

LECTURE II.

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY (*continued*).

November 11*th*, 1849.

I INTEND to continue this morning the course of observation which I commenced last Sunday on the practice of systematising in theology.

Inquiry is not opposed to knowledge. Inquiry implies some degree of knowledge as the stimulus to seeking after more. It is opposed, not to knowledge, but to that assumption of complete knowledge which alone can justify the systematiser. The abode of the human mind is neither in the dark regions of total ignorance, nor in the sunshine and unfading light of the land of complete knowledge, but in the wide space which lies between these two, and which humanity is endeavouring to pass over, to complete its journeyings from the one to the other. I do not think, therefore, that the views put forth in the publication entitled *The Religious Ideas*—although it is there repeatedly asserted that man has "Inquirer" for his proper name—are to be charged with enjoining either contentment in ignorance or the profession of universal scepticism. Although I have disclaimed any thing like a controversial treatment of the topics suggested by objections to those views,—although I do not intend to bandy arguments with or to make retorts upon writers who have their different systems to defend, as well as the thoughts of others to attack,—yet I shall hold myself quite free occasionally to state an objection, a difficulty, or a mistake in the words in which it has been actually put rather than in my own; and in many instances this will, I apprehend, facilitate the endeavour for its correction. On the assertion that I have made, that "Inquirer" is the proper appellation of man, this comment has been offered by a Roman-Catholic writer:

"Oh, sad and melancholy is it to read the mournful confession that 'the true and genuine position of humanity' is not *to know*, but *to inquire*, in all that is most worth knowing, in all that concerns himself, not as a sensual animal, but as a thinking, reasoning, and loving soul! What notion are we to entertain of this absolute truth and loveliness, towards which we are bid to tend, if it is a part of its decree that we shall live and die without hope, in stupefied ignorance of our future destiny, and of every thing but what relates to the well-being of this wretched, perishing, and corporeal frame? They tell us that at any rate they believe there *is* a God, and that universal benevolence and love is his great and distinguishing characteristic. They tell us that we ourselves are, in a certain sense, divine, and that our nature corresponds to all that is most in harmony with the Divine perfections. And yet we are to believe, that while knowledge is not only possible but easy in respect to material objects, to the visible world, and to our comfort and well-being as mortals, nothing can be ascertained respecting all that is most real, most true, most pure, and which alone lasts eternally. Man can know no more of himself than that he is a digesting, moving, talking, and labouring machine. His information cannot extend beyond the compass of a few years of sorrow and anxiety; and he is to plunge headlong into eternity with his eyes closed, as a suicide casts himself madly down a beetling precipice into the raging waves of the ocean below.

"Surely, if ever there *was* a thing incredible, it is this; if ever there was an assertion which demanded an unreasoning, blind, superstitious assent, it is this notion that inquiry, as opposed to knowledge, is the proper destiny of man in all that is truly good. He *may* learn how to plant a field, to build a house, to cook a dinner, to clothe his frame, to cure a fever, to ride a horse, to construct a railway, to conquer an enemy, to bury a dead body, and to write a history of the past and the visible; but beyond this he is to aspire no higher than the beasts of the field; he is to die the death of a dog, only removed from the cattle whom he has reared and employed by his consciousness of unsatisfied yearnings and of his ignorance of his future fate! Yet this is the philosophic creed of an age which deems itself an age of science and consistency. God be praised that this is not *our* belief! We do not yet gaze upon the unveiled glories of the Invisible One; we have not penetrated either into his secrets or fathomed all the mysteries of our own being; but we know enough to be our sure practical guide amid the storms and conflicts of life: a voice has come down to us from the eternal throne; and though it has spoken in no such tones of thunder as to overpower the din and clamour of this babbling generation, it has breathed a whisper into our inmost souls—a clear and sweet and harmonious strain—which reads to us the riddle of life, and assures us what we are and whither we are going."

I see no grounds for the broad distinction here drawn between man's knowledge of corporeal and of mental realities. It is assumed that the one is entirely within our grasp, and that, according to the views I have before expressed, the other is entirely beyond our grasp. Neither of these is the true state of the question. It is not simply in theology that I say "Inquirer" is the proper name of man; it is his name in every thing that he views, in all that he learns, in all that he does. There is no such perfection in the sciences as to warrant an absolute systematising, and such an imposition of that system on the minds of others as is usually attempted in theology. We are yet but groping our way in a thousand things, even those of the simplest kind. It is said that though man cannot know his own soul, his future life, or the perfections of the Deity, yet he may learn how to plant a field. Why, the science of agricultural chemistry is yet in its very infancy, and man's power of turning the fertility of the earth to account is a thing in which his name must yet for a long period be, and be only, that of "Inquirer." So I might go through this entire enumeration—this building a house, cooking a dinner, clothing his frame, curing a fever, riding a horse, constructing a railway, conquering an enemy, burying a dead body;—what are these all but things in which man is yet finding his way to better modes,—is yet, from day to day, inquiring, and inquiring successfully, and using the result of those inquiries to render every thing more efficient, more cheap, more convenient, and to diffuse its advantages more generally in society? What are all our sanitary reformers about? What is their universal testimony, but that they know more of the evils than they yet know of the remedies, and that they must make further and still further inquiries before the world is ripe for those great and wholesome changes which they are anticipating? Any person who should declare of physical knowledge, of the knowledge which relates even to the common arts of life, that we have it already so complete that we may form a system, and establish that system as absolute perfection, would be, in a physical sense, the enemy of the human kind.

The writer allows that we cannot know all that is desirable; but he says we may know enough for certain purposes: "We know enough to be our sure practical guide amid the storms and conflicts of life." This is what the systematiser is compelled to say: "We know not the whole plan of Providence,—not the entire history of man, —not the influences and agencies in their completeness which are at work in the heavens and the earth; but we know enough to be our sure practical guide amid the storms and conflicts of life." And the anti-systematiser may answer: "So do we." We demur to your systems, to your artificial arrangements, to your pretending to trace the principles of the Divine government and their ramifications, to define as on a map the boundaries of man's knowledge and duty, and to make yourselves absolute legislators within these boundaries; this is what we deny; but when you come merely to say that you know enough for practical guidance, we have that knowledge too. We disclaim system; we have certain religious ideas within us, the growth of our nature; we trace their confirmations and their illustrations all around us,—in the heavens and in the earth,—in the soil of the field,—in the depths and recesses of the globe and its hidden caverns,—in the history of the human race,—in the progress of civilisation,—in the rise and fall of states,—and in the yet more wondrous conflicts of the human mind—its depressions and its risings again, its efforts, its sorrows, and its successes. In all these there is much that we do and can know, and which suffices for our practical guidance. We go on, relying on the Divinity, of which we have, though a most imperfect conception, still one which suggests to us thoughts of consolation and of hope. We steer by the star, though we cannot pledge ourselves for its accurate admeasurement, though we cannot calculate its density, or describe its orbit; but it serves us for guidance; and in this, as in how many things, must we be content with imperfect knowledge and practical advantage, resting in the maxim that—

> "Better it is
> To bless the sun, than reason why he shines;
> And He thou speak'st of is above the sun"!

And when the systematiser tells us this will not satisfy him,—this is degrading,—is dying the death of a dog,—is going into eternity blindfold, and so on,—we may be allowed to ask, what more do the most systematic theologians know? What is it of which they are so certain? Do they know that their names are written "in the Lamb's book of life"? Do they know that their sins are forgiven? Do they know that sin and death came into the world by the instrumentality of Satan? Do they know what it is that God has decreed, and that he has a particular regard for them and some others, to the exclusion of the rest of the world? Do they know many other things which they are given to assert they know so distinctly and so surely? Do they know, can they produce any warrant for combining the whole into a system, and dictating to their fellow-men that such shall be their belief also? We demur to the assumption. If we look at what can be known, and if we pause there, we envy not those who can believe that they can go much further, and who feel very sure that they are right. Such surety cannot be communicated to our minds, and we can pursue our course without it, walking humbly with our God, trusting in his guidance, and cherishing the hopes, the boundless hopes, that "wander through eternity," which he has made the natural growth of our moral constitution.

"I know," says the absolute theologian in his pride of system. And what does "I know" mean? After all, only this, that "I believe I know." That is the extent to which he can go. It is, at most and at best, only opinion,—conviction; it cannot be made so clear and demonstrable as to command the assent of others. "What is truth?" said Pilate to Christ. According to the common gospels, no answer was given. The gospel of Nicodemus has a reply; it is said there that Christ answered Pilate,—"Truth is that which a man troweth." And how can we go beyond this? Convictions are truth to the individual; there are convictions in which another may coincide, and there is then what may be called a truth common to both; but in each case there is only the individual fact that such is what the man troweth. Hildebrand, the greatest of priests and of popes, the man who most distinctly understood the position of the Catholic Church, and whose ambition aspired the highest in his endeavour to enlarge its power,—who, according to his construction of the spiritual and the temporal, waged war by spiritual arms against temporal usurpation,—who raised the crosier against the sceptre, and the tiara against the crown,—Hildebrand, who would have made the Church conquer the world, and whose spirit, acting on future generations, was the source of the mightiest power which the Roman-Catholic Church ever achieved,—Hildebrand, when dying, was asked to absolve the enemies whom he had previously anathematised. The dying pontiff said: "I absolve all those who believe that my absolution will avail them." The distinction was well and wisely drawn. The power of absolution or of anathema is in the faith of the object towards which it is extended or at which it is levelled. He drew that boundary, not merely with the authority of a pontiff, but with the acuteness of a philosopher. The apostle Paul, before his conversion, thought that he knew what pleased God, that he knew God would be pleased by his persecuting Christians; and so he haled men, women, and children to prison, bonds, and death. He was as ready to say "I know" then, as he was afterwards to say, "I know only Christ Jesus and him crucified." Individual conviction was all that he could answer for in either instance. And individual conviction, arrived at, as it needs must be, from most imperfect knowledge, is not a warrant even for our framing for ourselves theological systems on which our faith is to rest as entire and complete expositions of the providential plan; still less does it warrant our imposing them upon others. Without this, as the writer says, we know enough. We know enough for our practical guidance. We do in religion that which we do in other things. There is no demonstrative proof, as I have before had occasion to remark,—there can be no demonstrative proof framed, of the perpetuity of the laws of nature,—no demonstration that the sun will rise to-morrow as he rose to-day,—that next year's harvest will ripen as last year's harvest ripened. And yet, with that reliance which imperfect knowledge and experience give, the husbandman pursues his course; he ploughs his field, he deposits his seed, he relies confidently upon the increase. And the sort of conviction which warrants the culture of the soil may also warrant the culture of the soul. On that same principle, on that same plan, we may use our best efforts to mature our own nature, to call forth the latent powers within us, to increase our acquirements, to arrive at the full development of our being; and the spiritual culture, like the physical, shall not go unrewarded.

Were it really the fact, as seems implied in the observations that I have read, that a theological system is essential for the quiet of man's conscience, the repose of his mind, and the guarantee of his hopes, it may reasonably be inferred that such a system would have been provided for by the Deity. And, on the grounds of those who make the objection, it would also follow, as an inevitable inference, that we should find such a system of theology in the Bible. Now, the plain fact is, which he who runs may read, that the Scriptures are not a theological system, but a history. They are the history of successive modes of thought, in a particular nation, on religious matters,—modes of thought which grew out of one another, each of which had its day, and led on to other and better views. And of this we have a most interesting record; but that record is not a system. The various books of Scripture do not combine into a system. There is not only no divine system represented as announced, like the law from Mount Sinai, but we do not have it in distinct, authenticated, and authoritative teaching. We do not have system at all, but a work as variegated as the grass and the flowers of the field. In no part of the Old or of the New Testament do we find any great principle of combination. The prophets and apostles were not labouring always, the one in succession and harmony with the other, to build up some common result. Their works do not make a system in the aggregate, any more than they teach one when considered separately. In the Levitical law, with all its minute ceremonies, ritual was systematised; theology and morality were never so systematised by the Scriptures. The prophets were intent upon immediate objects; theological system was the furthest thing in the world from their minds. They were intent upon the faithlessness and imbecility of Egypt,—upon the vexations arising from the remnant of Canaanites in the land,—upon the aggressions of Assyria,—upon the downfall of Babylon. Paul, indeed, did something in the systematising way in his epistle to the Romans; and what came from it? Why, that Paul found himself in collision with James,—one teaching that man is saved by faith and not by works, and the other that man is saved by works and not by faith. Systematising brought him into collision with another apostle, whose pretensions were as high as his own; and it made him unlike Christ. Did Christ systematise? Is there any thing of the kind in his recorded teachings? What have we there but isolated truths, seen by glimpses, their beauty and their power touchingly exhibited and brought home to the human heart? This, and nothing more than this. Is it conceivable, on the theory of inspiration, that inspiration should have left this essential work of systematising in theology undone, and that what inspiration neglected, human fallibility should have accomplished? Can we really suppose that such a thing, necessary for man's religious peace, if not for his salvation, was left undone by the school of the prophets that it might be done by the Council of Trent,—that it was left undone by Simon Peter that it might be achieved by John Calvin? We cannot imagine a work like this, retired from by the mightiest agencies, and then devolved upon the feeblest.

Nor has Christianity maintained itself in the world as a system. The Roman-Catholic form, it is true, was long endured; but it was long growing to its maturity. It went through various shapes before that domination over conscience was established upon earth. Political considerations and associations strengthened the papal hierarchy, and gave it much of abiding influence. And then, through a great portion of the time of its undisturbed reign, it had an ignorant world to deal with,—a barbarian world,—a world in which the ancient civilisation had passed away, and the new civilisation was not yet established in its place,—a world where men were content to let things pass unquestioned which in other days would have been the subject of ceaseless controversy. But the moment that intelligence was matured in Europe, mind and conscience rebelled against the Roman-Catholic authority. Protestantism arose; and is Protestantism a system? It is a hundred jarring systems, each one of them capable of being split into a hundred more, showing us something in mind of the infinite divisibility of matter.

Systems do not last. Churches may prescribe forms and doctrines; but how soon do they become mere forms,—the empty shell, the husk only of theology? An intelligent votary is dissatisfied with something or other; another bravely and openly, or else cautiously and furtively, steps over the boundary. Before temporal questions—questions of property, of rank, and of power—made theological discussion bitter and fierce, how many varied opinions had place in the Church of Rome? In modern times, although the Thirty-nine Articles have been imposed upon all teachers in the Anglican Church, yet what heresy is there, of whatever kind, of which we cannot produce the profession—not merely in some members, but in some ministers of that Church, in the volumes of its divines? And so in other sects. Methodism seems of late to give off an annual schism. In other bodies, where do we not find that some are suspected of individual opinions or heresies, and that others are outlawed for them? What great name is there, in all the annals of history, connected with religious opinions, that has altogether squared with the standard of orthodoxy in that writer's times? Not one. The child, the catechised child, the condemned criminal under the influence of the gaol-chaplain,—they will say they know this, that, and the other about God, the existence of the soul, and eternity; they will profess to know where such men as Milton, Locke, and Newton in modern times, and Socrates and Plato in ancient times, were free to confess that they did not know,—that they had but imperfect acquaintance indeed with subjects so vast and abstruse.

It was not by being a system that Christianity prevailed in the earth. Its rapid and extensive propagation was the result rather of pliability than of systematising. Dr. Jortin, in his remarks on Ecclesiastical History, has this observation:

"When Christianity became a bulky system, one may trace in it the genius of the loquacious and ever-wrangling Greeks; of the enthusiastic Africans, whose imagination was sublimated by the heat of the sun; of the superstitious Egyptians, whose fertile soil and warm climate produced monks and hermits swarming like animals sprung from the impregnated mud of the Nile; and of the ambitious and political Romans, who were resolved to rule over the world in one shape or other. To this we may add the Jewish zeal for trifles, arising from a contracted, illiberal mind; the learned subtlety of the Gentile philosophers; and the pomp and ceremony of Paganism."

Jewish Christianity, the harder and stricter form of the religion, died out, became defunct, in three or four generations. Gentile Christianity was eclectic; it incorporated philosophies in religion; it incorporated superstitions in religion; it took the reveries or the speculations of the wisest men of ancient times, and made doctrines of them; and it took the darkest and wildest fancies of ignorant barbarians, and it made doctrines of them too. This comprehensiveness was the very reverse of systematising; and it is too late in the day now to represent the Christian religion as having prevailed in the world by theological system during the eighteen centuries that have marked its course.

The spirit of systematising in theology is but too closely allied with that of persecution. The very assumption of knowing more than another, of knowing at least the broad outlines of all that is essential in theology,—that very assumption gives a man's mind a bias and a tendency to persecution. He persuades himself that he knows what will save his neighbour's soul; and is it not better that his soul should be saved, though it be by the destruction of his property, though it be by his incarceration, though it be even by the sacrifice of his life? He may reason thus with himself; and thousands, perhaps millions, have so reasoned. This assumption has generated a world of evils; the history of theological systematising is the history of persecution; and a long and a black history it is,—through periods when blood was shed like water, down to our own times, when this same spirit of systematising and of persecution is content with only teasing, worrying, scorning people, dividing society into castes, and fostering mutual jealousies and antipathies.

We are not going backward in disclaiming system in order to rest on a few great, simple, elementary ideas of religion. We are only consulting our true position, and seeing exactly where we are, what has been done, and what is to be done. Antagonism to theological systematising is, in a certain sense, destructive, but only in a certain sense. It sweeps away creeds at which "reason stands aghast, and faith herself is half confounded." It sweeps away doctrines, such as those of inspiration and satisfaction, full of incongruity and contradiction, offensive alike to the intellectual vision and to the moral sense. It opposes and sweeps away pretensions in one man to dictate to the thoughts, to the profession, to the conscience of another, and to fix a rule for the guidance of his mind and life. It sweeps away errors, the keystones of systems that have reared high their heads in the world, but which, before unity and simplicity, lose their coherence and stability, and come tumbling down like the towers and temples of a besieged city. And it lays the axe to the root of the persecuting tendency—that tendency which forbids men to fraternise on terms of mutual regard and mutual tolerance, leading each to suppose that he may have some errors in his own faith, and his neighbour much truth in his faith. It sweeps all these away; and what does it leave? Why, it leaves all the really known and the really knowable in religion, with the desire and the stimulus for their ever increasing. It leaves the light that shines abroad on the world, the "true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world," by which we discern those great and massive conceptions that form all our real inheritance in matters of theology. It leaves the generous impulse of aspiration and of expansion, teaching the mind to soar aloft, and bidding it to look abroad with eyes of love upon all that live. It leaves, in fact, the stimulus to well-doing, the hope of pure and perfect enjoyment; while it clears away the rubbish of theologians, and causes the fountains to flow whose waters convey consolation and moral strength, and which are full of blessing in life and in death.

LECTURE III.

Systematic Theology (*continued*).

November 18*th*, 1849.

It has been said that "the starting-point of all the highest forms of Christianity is the consciousness of sin." And this has been said, not merely by divines, engaged in upholding an antiquated creed, but by those whose religion is "prospective" as well as retrospective, and who look, not merely to creeds and books, but to the human soul and its aspirations, as their guidance in theology. If it be true, however, the views which I have been accustomed to maintain in this place are assuredly fallacious, for they imply a very different principle and starting-point. Had it been said that the consciousness of sin is the starting-point of the lowest forms of Christianity, I should have been less disposed to demur to the assertion. But how is the altitude measured of these highest forms? What constitutes the highest or the lowest form of Christianity, or of any other religion? Does not the result depend on the instrument, and is not that instrument the individual faith of the person who so classes religions and forms of religion? By what commonly accepted tests of the higher and lower can the assertion be verified? Is the Christianity which is entitled to be called the highest form, that of the widest extension, the Church which has enjoyed the longest-enduring spiritual authority? But, assuredly, the Roman-Catholic form of Christianity has for its starting-point, not the consciousness of sin, but the authority of the Church? Are we to measure height by intelligence—the general intelligence—by the philosophy of the theologian? The religion of such minds as those of Locke and Newton did not have its starting-point in the consciousness of sin; no, nor even of the best minds that have yielded a formal obedience to the creeds and confessions of the Anglican Church. For Jeremy Taylor tells—and tells with seeming complacency—the story, from one of the fathers, of a woman proceeding along a highway, with a lighted torch in one hand and a vase of water in the other; and being asked what she was about—what was meant by these emblems—she replied, that the fire was to burn the bowers of paradise, and the water to quench the flames of hell, so that man might love God for himself alone, and not from servile considerations. And, to look beyond the pale of Christianity, what are the highest and lowest forms of oriental theology? Do we not see the most enlightened nations, as the Persians, while they trace and acknowledge the conflict of good and evil, anticipating the time when good shall absorb all evil? If we go to the grosser superstitions of the Hindoos and other orientals, do we not find the human race considered as suffering punishment,—as lapsed intelligences that, by sin, have forfeited a higher sphere, and are here condemned to endure penance which is the result of their offences? If we take a summary view of all the religions of the world, or of the religions that have gone by and have had their day, I think we shall still find that the best, the purest, the noblest forms, are those which arise in the contemplation of good rather than in the apprehension of evil. It has been said that fear first made gods; but what gods did it make? Gods in the worst likeness of humanity, and acting upon the worst passions of humanity. If the consciousness of sin be the fountain of religion, its streams will only flow into the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone for evermore.

Sin is a violation of the dictates of that moral sense which is natural to humanity,—of that divine law, whether inscribed only upon the human heart, and in the course of providence, or in verbal dictates in a book,—the violation of these considered as an offence against the Deity. This is the particular point of view in which the word "sin" is applied; when looking only to other results, we use in preference vice, iniquity, [wickedness, or some other term. Sin is the favourite theological view of every deviation from the good, the true, the right, and the beautiful. And it is an absorbing one. It deadens the mind to the contemplation of what should most strongly act upon us,—the wrong we do to others, the wrong we do to our own souls. These should be before us, to deter us by the appalling and affecting pictures which they present. These are obscured; the notion of sin absorbs and obliterates them. "Against Thee, and Thee only, have I sinned," is said in a psalm ascribed to David, after the murder of Uriah; and if we do not interpret this as a form of expression exclusively pertaining to that royal dignity which could only sin against God, and not against man, having no man to whom it was responsible,—but if we take it as an expression which may be adopted by common humanity,—then it exhibits the very spirit of that system which makes religion begin in the consciousness of sin. "Against Thee only have I sinned!" That Deity, unaffected by David's aberrations, his providence not obstructed in its course, his nature not polluted or harmed, his glory incapable of being tarnished by any thing that David could do,—it was not against the Deity that his offence was so rank and foul, but against the murdered man in his social relations, and, through that, from the wound inflicted upon society itself; this was what should have humbled the royal penitent in dust and ashes. But the priest delights to dwell upon these fearful bearings; for connected therewith are dogmas, and a whole chain of propositions, in which metaphysical theology has delighted itself. The infinity of sin has been argued from its being committed against an Infinite Being; about as reasonable an argument as if we should allege the infinity of robbery and murder because they are committed, not only against an individual, but against the laws of the state, and, therefore, are offences against a whole nation in all its multitudinousness,—past, present, and to come. From the infinity of sin has been argued the eternity of punitive torment; from this, the necessity for mediation, atonement, or satisfaction; from this, the power, influence, and agency of the priest, whose authority has been thus largely augmented, and his influence extended in the world, till he brought the things of the world, in all their costliness, into what was called the divine sanctuary. From this have proceeded those notions of the value of forms, prayers, penances, and sacrifices, which have jostled true morality out of companionship with religion, and substituted for it a mere technical and Church-made morality,—the veriest husk of goodness that could be offered to the world.

It is not for us to presume to think for God, to say whether he be pleased or angry, and to set up the power of humanity as contravening his. It is enough for us to watch the results which belong to us and to our fellows, our brethren of the earth. We cannot answer for him; for how little do we know of him! We see laws prevailing around us, wise, just, and beneficent; and we see frequent apparent exceptions to those laws, both in the material and in the moral world; but we have every reason to believe that the exceptions are only apparent, and are referable to the same plan as the rule, and that one and all work together for the accomplishment of the schemes of unbounded wisdom and unbounded love. There is a law of growth in the plant and in the animal: the genuine and the prevailing results of that law are harmony and beauty; roots spread themselves below in the earth, and seek and find and imbibe their proper nutriment. The trunk arises in its firmness, and throws out its mighty branches; its leaves are watered by the dews of heaven, and are beautiful in heaven's light. Yet sometimes the tree grows distorted, or presents itself a grotesque or a frightful object; or, seemingly in disobedience to its proper nature, bears no fruit. Man then cuts it up as unsightly, or applies it to other modes and forms of usefulness. But he never dreams that in these cases nature is dishonoured, God dishonoured,—that the unfruitful or the unsightly tree commits an offence against the laws of nature or the laws of God. And so, when society, with a just self-defence, casts out the bad and noxious from its bosom, it may be still fulfilling—and they, in their blindness, may also be fulfilling—portions of that great plan which comprehends all; in which the good and the evil blend together for realising the will of the omnipotent Author of all. The consciousness of sin is as if the tree could be conscious that it is an unsightly growth; it must be a painful consciousness. There is a lack of harmony with the great system of things in which we move; a lack of harmony with our own conceptions of the all-wise and all-good Author of that system; a lack of harmony of our own powers, faculties, and tendencies, spiritual, intellectual, moral, and physical: they do not cohere. There must needs be a sense of pain, a grief, and a shame, which have their useful, their purifying, their elevating tendency, in the results of which alone the soul can find rest and peace.

And these should have their place—their proper place—in every delineation of religion, — the incidental, not the essential,—that which we must not overlook, but that which we should not allow to overspread all things.

Impressive delineations have sometimes been given to the world of the conflict of good and evil in the human soul; and such conflict, where, as in some instances, it has been fiercely waged, is no doubt a most impressive spectacle. It is as if the personified powers of light and darkness, angels of glory and fiends of the pit, were contending together. Such records may be more worth study than the annals of long wars, with their bloody battles and their brilliant victories. We have such a record before us in the autobiography of John Bunyan. We have such delineations before us in works of more recent date and of contemporaneous origin. But we may find in both much attributed to the agencies of this fierce conflict that will not bear the sober light of day. When we read the experiences of the author of the *Pilgrim's Progress*, we throw out of question those demoniacal whisperings which he continually heard in his dungeon, those strange sights and sounds by which he was haunted, and which he believed to be the external being and agency of fiends anxious to gain possession of his soul for eternity. And so, in the records of a later day, we throw out of question such notions as those of an angry God, of a God whose holiness is of such a sort that he is wroth with sin, and chastises the soul sometimes by direct agency. We throw out of question such notions as those of an independent power in the human will to contravene the will of God. Sweep away these, together with the demoniacal whisperings of the older record: there will still remain much that is truth, much that deserves to be studied; but there will be lost from the records much of that which gives plausibility to the assertion that the consciousness of sin is the starting-point of the higher forms of religion. Indeed, if it were so, man's great business would be to pursue such a course—as in the instances I have named—of wrestling with the arch-enemy, or with this ungoverned and ungovernable will, as would require all thoughts, all time, all exertion. If such delineations be true pictures of the religious life, why, then, the religious life is not a life to lead in this world. The circumstances of mankind are not fitted for it, have not been adapted to it by Providence. If such be really the essence of the religious life, away to the desert; hermits and anchorites were in the right. Solitude, meditation, fastings, vigils, prayers, —these are the great business of man. Let states, and commerce, and manufactures, and agriculture, and all that ministers to life and being here—through the physical to the intellectual, and through the intellectual to the moral and the spiritual—let all these go to the dogs, and let man fulfil his destiny in a condition which, when we look at it, only predicts a retrograde movement of society towards a state of utter barbarism. Such is plainly not the plan of Providence; and, therefore, consciousness of sin is not the starting-point of the highest forms of religion, or of the forms which Providence designed should prevail amongst mankind in this world of ours. They must have a religion which is more homely and hourly; a religion that can mingle itself in harmony with the pursuits and occupations —the honest and honourable pursuits and occupations—of active life, and that does not sternly frown even on its relaxations and amusements; a religion that can serve God by benefiting humanity; that is not so absorbed in the idea of sinning against God as to forget goodness towards our fellow-creatures. In fact, to sin against God consciously is incompatible with any just conceptions of Deity. To sin against God,—what is it? To sin against unbounded wisdom, to sin against unutterable loveliness, to sin against the very ideal—our own ideal—of perfection. It is not possible for a man to do this; he cannot blaspheme or wilfully speak evil of that which his inmost soul recognises as supreme good. Nor is it in this way, nor is it in connection with just conceptions of Divinity, that the notion of consciousness of sin against God, as the foundation and characteristic of religion, has arisen in the world; it has been from very different notions. Make your Deity a mere arbitrary power,—a being enveloped with all that atmosphere of weakness and passion that characterises human nature,—and that not in its highest condition; let your God be a partial God and a jealous God, a God delighting in interfering and giving laws about trifles; let him be an exacting God, claiming external service; let him be a trifling Deity, delighting in processions and sacrifices and external forms of homage;—and against such a God you may sin; against such a God you are most likely to sin; nay, I might say, it would inevitably happen,—because these conceptions are low, gross, and unworthy, and open the gates which lead you into contradiction and collision with the inextinguishable moral sense within us. It rebels against such a picture, against such a law, against such allegiance. It disowns the behests of a law requiring infinite perfection to be imposed upon finite beings, the penalty of transgression in any point whatever being an eternity of torment. It rises against them; and it does so, not in sin, but in righteousness. Far superior to those erring conceptions of a Divinity, it gives a more correct conception of the really true and good. And thus the moral sense has sometimes proved too strong for what was believed to be a Divine command. We are told of a certain king of Egypt, a servant of the gods, and a just ruler, and, of course—like the rest of the Egyptians in that day—a believer in dreams and visions, to whom Osiris appeared in the night, and commanded him to perpetrate a great and bloody massacre of the nobles of his people. The king resigned his throne next morning. He believed the crime to be ordained by the gods themselves, but that it was not ordained that it should be his work or duty to commit it. Nor have there been lacking instances in recent times in which the true feelings of the individual have rebelled—righteously rebelled—against his creed, and have set its dictates at nought. It was, to the individual, sin against God, because he did not know God; it was truth to humanity, to conscience, and to rectitude.

The different tendency of different systems, and the bearings of that which ascribes to the consciousness of sin the honour of being the starting-point in religion, and of that which ascribes to the sense of the good, the just, the lovely, the honour of being the starting-point in religion, may be exemplified with reference to two particular cases,—the view which each would give of the recovery of a mind from a state of wickedness, and of the preservation of the mind in a state of goodness. Now, I always prefer, where it is attainable, an appeal from theologians to those whose moral perceptions, whose undoubted appreciation of truth, whose psychological wisdom, entitle them to be heard on such matters. And instead of such notions of the conflict as are delineated on the supposition of sin being the origin of religion, I would give the mode in which one of our great poets has delineated the agency for the recovery of a mind that has been perverted into crime. The passage I am about to read is one not new to many of you, because I have used it on former occasions; but it is one which I never tire of reading to myself; and so I thought it might need little apology: especially as, introduced now for this specific purpose, it may perhaps be considered in a new light. I mean the speech which Coleridge, in his drama of *Remorse*, puts into the mouth of Alvar in the dungeon. In it he describes the mode which presents itself to his own mind as the best agency for recovering the soul from crime; and that is, not by rendering more intense the consciousness of sin, but by calling into livelier activity the sense of beauty:

"And this place my forefathers made for man!
This is the process of our Love and Wisdom
To each poor brother who offends against us,—
Most innocent, perhaps,—and what if guilty?
Is this the only cure? Merciful God!
Each pore and natural outlet shrivelled up
By Ignorance and parching Poverty,
His energies roll back upon his heart
And stagnate and corrupt, till, changed to poison,
They break out on him, like a loathsome plague-spot!
Then we call in our pampered mountebanks;
And this is their best cure! uncomforted
And friendless solitude, groaning and tears,
And savage faces, at the clanking hour,
Seen through the steam and vapours of his dungeon,
By the lamp's dismal twilight! So he lies
Circled with evil, till his very soul
Unmoulds its essence, hopelessly deformed
By sights of ever more deformity.
With other ministrations, thou, O Nature!
Healest thy wandering and distempered child:
Thou pourest on him thy soft influences,
Thy sunny hues, fair forms, and breathing sweets;
Thy melodies of woods and winds and waters!
Till he relent, and can no more endure
To be a jarring and a dissonant thing
Amid this general dance and minstrelsy;
But, bursting into tears, wins back his way,
His angry spirit healed and harmonised
By the benignant touch of love and beauty."

Such, in the estimation of one of the most philosophical of poets in our language, was the effect of dwelling intently upon the sight or thought of evil, and of being won to the sight and contemplation of good. He puts these two agencies into a contrast so striking, that they cannot fail at once to identify themselves with the contrasted systems of religion, and to bring to the mind a conviction of the advantage of the one over the other. The other poet to whom I make my appeal in this matter is, I think, a most unexceptionable tribunal to refer to,—I mean Wordsworth. And, as I said, the first delineation being that of the agency for cleansing a soul from wickedness, the one I am about to place before you is that of the mode in which the mind sustains itself in the path of goodness; whether, at first, not by the consciousness of sin, or apprehension of the results of sin, but by its own native and generous impulses; or, if these sometimes mislead and fail, as undoubtedly they may, by that sense of duty, that law to one's self, that paramount possession of the ideal of good in the mind, which, acting like a law, exerts a force similar to that of the law of gravitation in the system of the universe. And this delineation I find in a composition which is also well known, but of which I can say, as of the other, that perhaps it may not by many have been considered in this especial point of view. I refer to his "Ode to Duty;" and I shall read the whole of it, because no delineation of my own would answer the purpose better, or so well as that which he has here given:

" Stern daughter of the voice of God!
  O Duty! if that name thou love,
 Who art a light to guide, a rod
  To check the erring, and reprove;
 Thou who art victory and law
 When empty terrors overawe;
 From vain temptations dost set free,
And calm'st the weary strife of frail humanity:

 There are who ask not if thine eye
  Be on them; who, in love and truth,
 Where no misgiving is, rely
  Upon the genial sense of youth.
 Glad hearts! without reproach or blot,
 Who do thy work and know it not;
 Long may the kindly impulse last!
But thou, if they should totter, teach them to stand fast!

Serene will be our days and bright,
And happy will our nature be,
When love is an unerring light,
And joy its own security;
And they a blissful course may hold
Even now, who, not unwisely bold,
Live in the spirit of this creed,
Yet find that other strength, according to their need.

I, loving freedom, and untried,
No sport of every random gust,
Yet being to myself a guide,
Too blindly have reposed my trust:
And oft, when in my heart was heard
Thy timely mandate, I deferred
The task, in smoother walks to stray;
But thee I now would serve more strictly, if I may.

Through no disturbance of my soul,
Or strong compunction in me wrought,
I supplicate for thy control,
But in the quietness of thought:
Me this unchartered freedom tires;
I feel the weight of chance-desires:
My hopes no more must change their name,—
I long for a repose that ever is the same.

Stern lawgiver! yet thou dost wear
The Godhead's most benignant grace;
Nor know we any thing so fair
As is the smile upon thy face:
Flowers laugh before thee on their beds,
And fragrance in thy footing treads;
Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong,
And the most ancient Heavens, through thee, are fresh and strong.

To humbler functions, awful power!
I call thee: I myself commend
Unto thy guidance from this hour;
Oh, let my weakness have an end!
Give unto me, made lowly wise,
The spirit of self-sacrifice;
The confidence of reason give,
And in the light of truth thy bondman let me live."

In this beautiful and philosophical description,—this picture of a mind that does justice to its own impulses,—that begins its religion, not with consciousness of sin, but with trust in God,—that holds on its course, becoming a law to itself when impulses have led astray,—in this delineation I trace what, to my mind at least, is a more genuine, attractive, consistent, and lovely form of religion than any which can be resolved into the belief of a transgressing progenitor, a condemned world, and in which religion, from the very first, and all through, must be a struggle of the soul with the consciousness of sin, and an ineffectual attempt to escape from "the body of that death."

Nor is it recommended by its results. It tends to make religion a bargain. The sinner looks to the atonement; he holds in his hand a price to offer the Deity; there are the conditions of what approximates to a commercial transaction. Then there is the constant tendency to degenerate into mere form; and self-satisfied persons call themselves "miserable sinners" in a church, that would knock any man down who called them so in the street or upon 'Change. There is a continual series of external observances, till all the life of religion is worn out from the mind, and nothing of power is left, compared with that which has been depicted by the two great authorities to whom I have appealed, as the course which, in their view, would reclaim the wandering and confirm and mature the good. There is selfism at the bottom of this view of religion,—this consciousness of sin is the beginning of it all. It arises from a notion of our own importance in the sight of Deity, from the idea that our obedience is honouring him, that our transgressions are disgracing him, that we have his glory, as it were, in our hands. We can infinitely less have that than we can control the course of the planets, or regulate the shining of the distant stars. God will be better known and regarded as just conceptions of his being, plans, and nature, and loftier views of the infinite and everlasting, arise in our minds; and our spiritual wisdom, to my apprehension at least, is in fixing our mental gaze most intently, not on the evil that is within us, but on the good that is around and above us. Let contemplation of the good work in us a moral similitude. That is a fine saying of the apostle Paul: "We all, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory unto glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord." The contemplation of the great, the heroic, the pure, the beneficent, tends to generate like qualities,—shadows them forth in our minds,—and from shadows they become realities; they find their way, from our thoughts and feelings, into our words and actions, and become our characteristics. They tell the mind to look out of itself, to be relieved from its burden; to look on the laws of the moral world, mingling and blending in wondrous harmony with the laws of the physical world,—all of them having indications that they are portions of one great whole. And thus shall we look through nature up to nature's God, in the best and purest sense of the phrase, as a God of holiness; and while we render homage and adoration to him—the only and infinitely pure and lovely—we shall hear his voice in our inmost heart saying, "Be ye holy, as I am holy."

LECTURE IV.

Alleged Exclusiveness of Christianity.

November 25th, 1849.

It has been said, that the views put forward in *The Religious Ideas* constitute an "eclectic religion,"—that is to say, a religion made up by selecting from the different religions of mankind whatever seems best and truest, with an endeavour to combine these into one religious statement. Now, this would not be an idle or useless endeavour; because there are in all religions great truths, mixed up in all religions, indeed, with superstition; and hence, to sever the grain from the chaff, to detect the good and part it from the evil, and to see how far that good is capable of arrangement into a methodical and harmonious combination, might be rendering a very acceptable service to mankind. But I beg to observe, that this is wholly a mistake as to the principle which I endeavoured to develop in my lectures on the religious ideas; for they are not of this eclectic description; they are not a picking and a selection from the different religions of the world; but they are an endeavour to show the source of the truths which exist in all religions. They moot the question,—Whence came these truths? how did they originate? And then there comes also the other interesting question,—Whence come the falsehoods in religion? what is their character? and how do they originate? In the course of lectures on the religious ideas I endeavoured to answer the first of these questions, tracing religious truth to its source in human nature,—showing that, not by selecting from different religions, but by going to that which is anterior to all religions, we obtain the essence of all; and in the course delivered in the early months of this year, on the modifying causes which have influenced the development of the religious ideas, I endeavoured to answer the other question, Whence came the falsehoods in religion, and how did they originate?—

showing, or endeavouring to show, that they have sprung from accidental causes, from the ignorance, the errors, the pretensions—it may be, the crimes—of mankind,—from causes as transient as the causes of what is true and good in all religions are enduring and powerful. So that the views at which we thus arrive are not a selection, made whether according to the taste of an individual or according to the common sense of mankind. They are an indication of the sources of all that is real and excellent in religion; and they show that they have arisen from no miraculous fountain, irregular in the flow of its waters, and doomed in time to dry up, but that they spring from a perennial source, that they are the product of human nature, and must endure, and have a self-corrective power, while human nature endures.

It has also been said, that the argument from the tendencies in our own nature to the existence of objective realities without,—from our own faculties to the objects on which those faculties are exercised,—is a mode of argument or illustration which is capable of being applied in behalf of the miraculous—for there is a tendency in mankind towards the wonderful, a craving after the wonderful; and that, therefore, by the analogy of this correspondence between the inner faculty and the objective reality, we have a presumption in behalf of what are called the miraculous attestations of divine revelation. There is a certain amount of truth in the asserted tendency of human nature towards the wonderful: we see it strongly displayed in children; we see it strong in the world's infancy, in the childhood of the human race. But it has its gratification. If it be only a blind credulity, it will be satisfied; there will forthwith be attempts to minister to it from various quarters: the craving of mankind for the wonderful has never been allowed long to go ungratified. And if it be something better than a blind credulity,—if it be an enlightened desire after the grand and the ennobling,—it has its satisfaction also,—not in miracles, which cannot permanently satisfy,—not in those transformations and metamorphoses which for a while excite wonder, and then wear out, pall upon the intellect, and then fall into disregard and contempt. Nature, the more that nature is understood,—science, the more that science advances,—these minister abundantly to man's desire for the wonderful; and the plain record of the mechanical operations and the chemical discoveries and applications of the present age is far more astounding than all the tales of the *Arabian Nights*, than all the wonders which, in oriental regions, have been ever connected with the most successful and with the most pretending claims to revelation. The fact is, that miracle has ceased to act on the human mind in our age and country as it did in past times. People believe in ancient miracles, but they will not believe in modern miracles. What claim to reception would a new religion have, in any part of the world,—what likelihood of successful countenance,—by any parade of miracles? How would it fare with all the intelligent portion of all countries? It is obvious that no such religion now would have, on this ground, the slightest chance of obtaining any extensive influence. We have an instance of what can be done, and how soon the limits are reached, in our own country. Not many years ago, the congregation of that eccentric, but, in many respects, interesting man,—Edward Irving,—claimed to have among them the gift of tongues, as the first Christians had; and although this was said to be practically exhibited, how far does the belief extend? It appeared, by some circumstances which transpired the other day, in connection with a trial on a will, that there was altogether a body, scattered over the kingdom, of some four thousand persons who believed that miraculous powers inhered in the Christian Church at the present day, as taught by Edward Irving; and here the faith seems to have reached its limits. And yet, in aid of this doctrine, there was scripture at the back, to support its promulgators; for there are promises which, taken in their literal acceptation, fully bear out this claim of permanent preternatural powers in the Christian Church; and yet the doctrine of these persons, with the testimony of scripture to support them,—which so many millions affect to believe verbally and textually and to the very letter,—has failed to gain more than four thousand converts.

The belief in miracles is a question of time. There are eras when such a belief will obtain; there are others when it cannot obtain, or make any deep impression, when it becomes only a traditionary faith, a conventional creed,—as it is, indeed, at the present day. At first, Christianity might rest on miracles; the time soon came when the miracles rested on Christianity; and then another time came when the burden was found somewhat heavy for Christianity to bear, and when the question of the breath and life of spiritual Christianity showed itself connected with the possibility or impossibility of throwing off this heavy load. Thus much as to two incidental objections which have been stated.

I come now to the question which I propose to discuss this morning,—Whether a denial of the exclusive character of Christianity be tantamount to a denial of Christianity itself? I affirm that it is not. I demur to the dilemma which is thus propounded. I say that Christianity will remain a name representing a beautiful and a glorious thing, although the exclusiveness as to its being the only true religion, which is so commonly claimed, be altogether relinquished.

I object to being reduced to any such dilemma,—first, because the scriptures themselves are not exclusive. The claim is set up for them, but not set up by them. There is nothing in them to preclude other scriptures, other discoveries, which are revelations in religion. They fix no such ban upon the future; they attempt not to seal up the fountains of Divine knowledge in humanity and in the world. There is, to be sure, a text in the Revelations denouncing a curse on those who should add to or take away from the words of that book; but it is only to that book that this sanction applies, and it rests only on the authority of the unknown writer of that book. It has no application to the great body of the diversified writings that constitute the Old and the New Testaments. There is no more appearance of exclusiveness, of finality, in the New Testament than there was in the Old Testament. It has remained centuries without addition, the human mind soliciting itself only about interpretation. The writings of the apostles, and others connected with them, have remained centuries also without addition, but still with no further appearance of any thing in their nature to preclude it than there was as to the Old Testament. Mahometanism claimed to be a third religion, connected with the two previous ones,—connected with Christianity as Christianity had been connected with Judaism. It was asserted of Mahomet that he was the Comforter promised by Christ to his apostles, the Spirit that was "to guide them into all truth,"—the Spirit which has, unhappily, not yet appeared in the world. The epistle of Barnabas is not contained in the New Testament; and why not, as well as the epistles of Paul, his companion and fellow-labourer? What draws the distinction,—itself altogether an arbitrary one? The vote of a Council, it may be. Who gave any Council power to canonise Paul, and to disqualify Barnabas and expel him from the canon? The whole aspect of the scriptures is the delineation—the historical, not the dogmatical delineation—of religious opinion in its progress and its advancement; and because we choose to take certain books only—a selection, be it observed, from the books which were written about Christ, or the books which were produced in the older dispensation—and hold them up together as one volume, are we therefore to conclude that all religion is contained within those books?—is the world's religion to be concluded by the mechanical operations of a bookbinder? That would be as absurd as setting a seal upon science, and giving us some book, already becoming obsolete,—some elementary book,—and saying that beyond this the human mind shall not advance. I deny that there is any pretension of this kind in the scriptures, and, therefore, that the exclusiveness ascribed to Christianity is inherent in the system.

Again, a system which is exclusive in its doctrines should be exclusive also in the origin of those doctrines. If it lays claim to a monopoly, it should produce the grounds and basis of that monopoly. The truths which it enforces on the world, as containing all religious truth, should be its own, its own revelation, its own discovery. Now, Christianity is full of truths derived *ab extrâ*, truths from other sources, truths which, if revealed at all preternaturally, were revealed, not to the Jews, but to other and more ancient oriental nations. The spirituality of the Deity is a great truth in Judaism and in Christianity: Moses learned it in Egypt before he taught it in the wilderness. The future life of man—his immortality—is a great doctrine of Christianity: the Jews learned that doctrine during their captivity in Babylon. And of the moral precepts in the New Testament, how many there are which are to be found scattered about in writings produced during previous ages,—how many in the purest and the noblest of the maxims ascribed to the Chinese Confucius! And if, instead of taking those real and paramount truths, we take what are commonly received as Christian doctrines, but which are of a more questionable character; if we take the notions about the angelic hierarchy, about hades, and the state of the dead, about devils and demons, and Satan their prince and leader,—if we take even the resurrection of the corporeal form of man, —why, none of these things were of Jewish origin especially. We can trace them in other quarters, we can mark their course backward, till we arrive at other sources beyond the boundaries of the Jewish nation or of the Christian Church. Now, if there be no pretension to these doctrines as the peculiar disclosures and revelations of Christianity, the notion of its exclusiveness appears to me to fall to the ground of itself. That which did not exclusively originate, cannot be the exclusive depository of all the world's truth in relation to religion. Indeed, who is there that can tell all the sources from which religious knowledge or religious thought is derived? There is no event in history, there is no character in human nature, there is no material object of the heavens or the earth, there is no arrangement or ordination—such as that of the revolving seasons, or of day and night, of heat and cold, of summer and winter—there is nothing in the world which may not minister to man's better and loftier thoughts, which may not give those thoughts a higher character or a wider expansiveness. Let him not, then, willingly preclude himself, shut himself out, wrap himself up in the idolatry of the maxims and assertions that may be contained within the covers of a book, and say, "Here is all religion; all this, every word and tittle, shall be believed, and nothing else shall be believed."

It may be said that the apostles taught exclusive doctrines,—confined salvation to faith in one name or person only, and, by implication, in the truths which he taught. Well, I reply, if the apostles were exclusive, their Master was not, he who was greater than all his apostles. We find no such language in him as is common now, as to the necessity of peculiar forms and tenets being received as the summary of all religion, and all without condemned as depraved and diabolical error. This is wholly alien from the genuine teachings of Christ, from those pure and simple and heart-touching parables of his which are preserved to us in the gospels. Nor do the apostles always speak exclusively. They had, at any rate, if not prevailing, yet intermitting, seasons in which their minds took a wider scope and their words breathed a more liberal spirit. I mean such times as those when the apostle Peter, impressed with the character of a Gentile, said, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation, he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him." I mean such times as that when Paul recognised the worth of the good thoughts and good deeds and faithful consciences of the heathen, and said that "These, having not the law, are a law unto themselves; their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another." I mean such times as the evangelical John experienced when he declared that that was "the true light,"—not that which shone within the narrow boundaries of Judæa,—no, nor of the Christian Church,—but "that which lighteth every man that cometh into the world;" and when,—whether it were the same evangelist John, or John the elder, the author of the epistle under that name,—he says, "He that loveth, liveth in God, and God in him." These all carry us beyond the narrow boundaries of an exclusive system; and if you say still, there are other passages of a different character, I say we are not to tamper with our own intellects, we are not to tamper with the knowledge of invisible realities, we are not to tamper with the advance of moral truth, for the sake of upholding the consistency even of an apostle. For we know that those men made great and serious mistakes. We find that in their writings they looked for a speedy reappearance of Christ upon earth; they expected the time when he would raise his own peculiar people from the dead, after which they should live and reign and govern the world for a thousand years. A great change and convulsion in nature, and a revolution in the moral world,—these were anticipated by the apostles as things which some of them were certainly designed to live to see realised. Seventeen centuries have flowed in stern succession, setting the seal of error on such anticipations, and thereby demolishing for ever the doctrine of absolute infallibility.

And I would ask of those who would uphold Christianity especially and only as an exclusive system, What form of Christianity is it that is exclusive? For within Christianity, under its common name, you may find religions as varying in spirit, almost as diversified in tenets, as capable of broad discrimination from one another, as you can find amongst the different religions beyond the boundary of Christianity. You find within it, and under that common name, systems which pass unhesitatingly upon each other's creeds the condemnation of damnable heresy. You find the exclusion narrowed, narrowed to this or that form, each one vaunting itself to be that form of Christianity which is the only true religion, that is, the really exclusive religion. Even in sects you find the same diversities. There are as many and as incongruous interpretations of the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England, not only by the members, but by ministers of that Church, as there are of the New Testament. Who, then, is to come forward and say that his interpretation is a reality, that the reality he thus interprets is exclusive, and forbid us to recognise divine truth in any other religion? Such a statement is inconsistent with human nature itself, with the Divine impartiality and universality, and with the language of facts. It is inconsistent with human nature; because if the religious ideas are, as I have endeavoured to show, the natural product of humanity,—if they are the inherent and common tendencies of our intellectual and moral constitution,—they cannot be limited within the boundaries of any positive system whatever, they are anterior to, they are paramount over, all positive systems. And has not human nature this tendency? Whether men have Christianity or not, do they live without a religion, any more than they live without a government? Let them form their society in any way whatever—take, for instance, the mutineers of the *Bounty*, land a few of them on the island now called Pitcairn's Island—the very first things they do are to fall into order, to shape their rudiments of government and of religion. And such are the general tendencies of our being; you cannot circumscribe religion within any narrower boundaries than the boundaries of human nature. What is the Deity that Christianity itself teaches? The God of all the dwellers upon earth; the God that "hath made of one blood all nations, kindreds, and people, to dwell on the face of all the earth." Is it for us to narrow the agency of such a being, or the knowledge of him or his worship, or a sincere and acceptable obedience? Does not the Divine universality imply the universality of religion also? Does it not imply something far beyond all, and much above all, that any positive system, even the best and the soundest, can confer upon its believers? And what is the fact? Have not just views of religion increased in modern times, as they did in ancient times? Have not even the various systems that have become obsolete yet rendered some contribution to true and pure religion? Do not existing systems, heresies and idolatries as they are called, yet also contribute towards this great aggregate of religious and moral truth? The mythology of the Greeks, whatever may be said of its multiplied divinities, —did it not, by that multiplication, give us a conviction of the connection of the universal and all-pervading Spirit with all the manifestations of the material world? The Brahminical speculations which characterise the best forms of the Hindoo religion,—have not they led to grand conceptions of the one, the infinite, the universal, and the eternal Spirit, from whom all things are an emanation? Mahometanism, with its stern fatalism,—does it not in that fatalism still shadow out the truth that law prevails in the moral as in the material world—that there is a law over human intelligence, a law over human destiny? While religions are thus contributing in different ways to the gradual progress of religious knowledge and truth, is it fair, is it just, is it tolerable, that all knowledge should be ascribed to one positive system, and every thing else be represented as only fatal or dangerous error?

The best portions of Christianity are its universalities. It is in these that it is grandest, in these that it is truest. It is when its writers or teachers look beyond the limits of system, it is when they look up to the heavens which are over all, and look abroad to the diversified nations of the earth,—it is then that they pour forth the truest strains of inspiration, it is then that they insure the most prompt and cordial response from our bosoms. Whatever is true, whatever is sound, wise, good, beautiful in Christianity, these must last; but by its very nature it is not exclusive. We enter more into the spirit of this best portion of Christianity when we rise from the technicality of its doctrines to the moral feeling which is yet latent in them, and when we turn from thoughts of the metaphysical nature of Christ and speculations on the threefold division in the Deity to look at the devoted spirit of Christ, teaching us to live and to die, if necessary, for mankind. We best enter into the purest spirit of Christianity when we look from its narrow claims to inspiration or revelation to its recognition of the universal truth which belongs to us, and ask the question put by Christ to the Pharisees,—"Why do ye not even of yourselves judge that which is right?" We enter best into the spirit of Christianity when we turn from its speculations upon the resurrection of the saints, and the reign of the saints with Christ for a thousand years upon earth, to regard the fact which may be shadowed forth under such mythical forms,—that the great and good dead have not perished from the world as to their influence, that they still live and exercise power amongst us; that being dead they yet speak, and their spirits are abroad, raising humanity towards their own exalted position. We best enter into the spirit of Christianity when we turn from prayers such as are now commonly offered, perhaps without sufficient scriptural warrant, which are bounded to offering and asking every thing in the name of Christ, to find in our own minds and souls an echo to the song not unworthily ascribed to angels,—"Glory to God in the highest; on earth peace, and good-will towards men." It is not denying, it is not degrading, Christianity, to protest against the combination with that word of exclusive claims to be the true religion, and the only true religion. Instead of degradation, it is an exaltation, because we really assign to it a higher sphere; we take its truths from the uncertain basis of Jewish tradition, and place those truths on the unfailing rock of the natural principles of our constitution, which are the work of the Creator of all things. In so doing, we recognise what there is in it of the universal and the enduring, and we put it on its proper basis. We raise it from a kind of evidence which is doomed to fade away with the lapse of years, and connect those truths with evidence which never can fail whilst humanity itself shall last. We thus render the "true faith of a Christian"—that is, the faith of a Christian in the great truths of the system which he looks to with respect, though he does not accept it with blind and undiscriminating conviction; we raise this faith, I say, to a loftier position, and regard it as akin with what is loveliest and most lasting in nature,—with the shining stars, with the rolling waters, with the song of birds; we identify it with the light that is universal, and the natural laws that are everlasting: and in thus connecting it, I think we render a homage far more honourable to Christianity than the system which claims for this or that mode of belief to be the only belief which will insure man's salvation.

LECTURE V.

The Doctrine of Necessity.

January 6th, 1850.

In one of the lectures on the religious ideas—that on "Creation and Providence"—I made this observation: "The notion of law, the universal law of nature, when once it arises, and is clearly apprehended, brings what is called creation within the same category as the events by which it is followed. It sees in them all developments, and developments only—the one, infinite, universal, and eternal; and all else modifications and manifestations." This notion has been said, and truly said, to pervade the whole of that publication; and it has been objected to it that it is incompatible with the free-will of human nature and the phenomena thence arising, with the devotional tendencies which are so general as to seem instinctive in our being, and with that consolation which it is supposed religion generally and Christianity especially is designed to furnish. The last two of these objections are a species of argumentation which it is by no means correct generally to apply. Our dislike of the consequences of a proposition is no disproof of the proposition itself. That may be very true which yet is attended with results that, to us, are very disagreeable. The objection from such influences has been compared, and very properly compared, with the reply of a man who, on being asked whether a house is built upon a firm foundation, should answer, that he thought there was by no means an agreeable prospect from the top of it. It is as if, instead of inquiring on what basis the great pyramid rests, we should think it enough, to demolish the assumption of its stability and endurance, if we answered that from the summit we only look around upon the huts of slaves, upon ruined temples whose abdicated gods have left their altars prostrate, and upon a wide waste of desert sands. All this may be; and yet the pyramid has been so built as to last for ages, and will stand for ages yet to come.

The first objection, indeed—the incompatibility with the free-will of man—is of a different kind. I do not purpose incidentally, in a single lecture, to enter on the great question of free-will and necessity—about which, indeed, there is much of mere verbal embarrassment. The terms are unhappily chosen. What is meant by free-will? That there is the same sort of freedom in the last thought preceding action as in the thoughts which came before, is not really denied by the sturdiest advocates of philosophical necessity. And the term "necessity" is not well chosen, because it inevitably suggests the notion of some external and constraining force. Men do not discriminate between the law which binds an individual against his will, and the law of his nature, which only acts by his will and innate tendencies. It is said that we are conscious of free-will. To be sure we are, of that sort of free-will which any intelligent being can possess. But who is there that is conscious of any other than this? Who is there that is conscious of preferring what seems evil at the moment to what seems good at the moment? Who is there that is conscious of having any volition to prefer the apparent evil to the apparent good, or of any desire to have such a volition? The seeming best at one moment may not be the seeming best at another moment; there may be times when, under peculiar influences, a man wills that as good which, in the general course of his life and under other influences, he does not appreciate as deserving the appellation of good. But still, it by no means follows from all this that belief—for we shall be led to that result eventually—is an affair of volition,—that a man can believe what he pleases. If it were, who would believe any thing disagreeable? Who would believe in things that bring pain and deep regret? Who, with the intelligence, credibly authenticated, of the death of a child or of a friend at a distance, would believe that event, if belief were a matter of mere volition—if it were not subject to laws, like all other mental operations, and those mental operations subject to laws as well as the mere material objects and movements of external nature?

There is law in mind as well as in matter, as supreme, as undeviating. But then, say some, the consequence of this will be to abolish the notion of sin in the world, which is man's abuse of the exercise of his free-will. So, then, an exploded philosophy is made an intellectual subterfuge, in order to prop up a dying theology! This, surely, is not becoming either to philosophy or to religion. It has been said, "This would make God the author of sin." It would become man not to be so very careful about Divinity; Divinity will take care of its own character and of its own glory. Whatever we find existing, whatever is in progress, we may be sure is all well ordered by the wisdom and the power which established those laws that extend over universal being; and it is not for us to come forward as the champions of the Divine character against objects of Divine creation and events of Divine direction. "I will answer for my patron saint," says the friar in *Ivanhoe* to King Richard. "Answer for thyself, friar," was the monarch's reply; and it may well be the reply to those who set themselves up as a sort of patronising champions of the Divine character.

Whatever may be said of the philosophical analysis which is worked by some minds, bringing out this notion of a will that has power to decide against motive, certain it is that there is no free-will in humanity that is not exercised according to laws, which laws are traceable. In what seems most spontaneous, most individual, most capricious, there is yet, when we look at things on a large scale, the obvious trace of law, order, and the connection of cause and effect, as firm, certain, and invariable as in the simplest mechanical operations. Now, this has been made remarkably clear by some statistical returns which were noticed in the *Prospective Review*—a work in which the other theory has, in theological matters, been advocated. In a notice, a few months ago, of the work of Quetelet *On the Social System*, where a number of statistics, especially in reference to Belgium, have been accumulated and placed in a very striking arrangement, there is this remark:

"Free-will, so conspicuous when we study how it impels a single individual, seems almost to disappear as we contemplate large masses of mankind. Nay, those very actions resulting from the undoubted, unmistakable will and pleasure of men appear to recur and to be performed by them with even greater regularity and more constant and exact proportions than do effects which are the consequences of simple physical laws, and apparently withdrawn from the each of human passion and caprice."—*Quetelet.*

One of the illustrations of this is the Belgian statistics as to marriage. "These documents, which have been kept with great care in that country, show that the annual number of marriages—regard being had to the increase of population—maintains constantly the same proportions,—nay, that it varies less even than the number of deaths, although this latter event is not, like the former, an act of the will. We may say that the Belgian population has paid its tribute to marriage with more of regularity than to death.* But more than that, not only does the number of marriages continuously recur, but the proportion of bachelors marrying spinsters, bachelors marrying widows, widowers and spinsters, widowers and widows even, perpetually reappears; and these last unions, however few in number, manifest a remarkable regularity, of which there exist few stronger instances in statistics. Indeed, the harmony of ages is so general, that it almost seems as if severe penalties had been appended by law to marriages between persons of disproportionate years, so minute, yet so exact, is the ratio in which they return."—*Review.*

"That young man under thirty who espouses a sexagenarian bride was impelled thereto neither by fatality nor by blind passion; he could fully reason and exercise his judgment upon his choice; yet he has come, nevertheless, to pay his tribute to the budget which is annually voted by the wants and necessities of our general organisation; and here again this budget has been paid with greater punctuality than that which we pay to the exchequer of the state."—*Quetelet.*

"To go to another class of occurrences—offences against the laws. France, Belgium, England, and the Grand Duchy of Baden have for some time carefully compiled and registered their criminal statistics. The ages of the convicts have been compared by M. Quetelet, and a remarkable agreement is shown in all these countries—the only ones in which such records have been kept—as to the tendency to crime in different periods of life. Towards the age of puberty, it develops itself rapidly; attains its maximum between twenty and thirty; and then regularly decreases to the close of life. In France, the maximum prevails at twenty-four; in Belgium, at twenty-six; in England and Baden, rather sooner. The occurrence of suicides follows another progression. The returns show a slight tendency only as puberty approaches; but it increases up to fifty, and continues even to extreme old age. What is more singular still is, not only the steady ratio of those who die by their own hands, but the fact that even their ages, and the very instruments and means wherewith self-destruction is inflicted, maintain a similar proportion. . . . In this view the author maintains that free-will, so far from being an obstacle to the regular succession of social currents, rather favours their production and continuity, and establishes—what at first might appear paradoxical—the deduction that 'social phenomena, influenced by man's free-will, proceed from year to year with greater regularity than those other phenomena purely dependent on material and fortuitous causes.'"

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* "L'on peut dire que la population Belge a payé son tribut au mariage avec plus de regularité qu'à la mort; cependant on ne se consulte pas pour mourir, comme on le fait pour se marier."

There is, then, as I said, in what seems the most capricious in those attachments and their results, which arise one knows not how, so as to defy all previous calculation in individual cases,—there is even here evidence of that system of law which we maintain extends over all things that exist. The course of events has been to show that this law existed where at first it was by no means suspected. What, indeed, is the pursuit of science? It is the endeavour to generalise, to discover the connection of cause and effect, where else that connection had not been supposed traceable. How many things have been referred, in the progress of science, to cause and effect, which originally were deemed to be undeniable demonstrations of Divine interposition? The voice of the thunder, the plenty of the harvest, storms, death,—all these were originally reckoned immediate acts of some interposing power: they have all been traced to law. In the infancy of medical science, before diseases and their results were distinctly apprehended, how many cases would there be like those in which, in our days, the coroner's jury returns a verdict of "Died by the visitation of God"! The "visitation of God" is increasingly resolved into the natural sequence of cause and effect, and will continue to be so resolved, until every case whatever may be accounted for. It is not that this drives the notion of a Deity or a Providence out of the world; on the contrary, it extends it more largely and widely than the theory of interposition. That theory abandons a great portion of the universe to mere chance or to material agency; whilst in this we see a diffusive power, that penetrates even to the remotest atoms of existence.

And this has taken place, not only by the gradual discovery of the connection of cause and effect, as in the application of steam and other powers to human uses, but it has taken place in what was deemed most beyond the reach of law, and only referable to immediate Divine will. Christ says to Nicodemus, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof; but thou canst not tell whence it cometh nor whither it goeth: and so is every one that is born of the Spirit." Here is the motion of the wind spoken of for the moment as free from the great chain of causes and effects, and the spiritual change or progress of man as also free. Both are apparently resolved into mere will, immediate action, or interposition; and yet, how is this? The progress of science in the material world and in the intellectual world has found a law in both cases: the winds and the tempests obey it; we begin to understand the law of storms; and while physics will explain the law of storms, metaphysical science explores the biography of the human heart, traces its advance, and shows the chain of cause and effect resulting in the formation of character or in the change of character.

But then, it is said, if such be the case, why should man pray? And I answer, Why should man wish? He cannot help it. In pain we must wish for relief—in peril we must wish for strength, for deliverance; and what is prayer but wish—the wish solemnly expressed, the wish uttered, not as a charm which can change the mind and will of Deity, not as a mysterious power which is to prevail over the laws of nature—but the wish uttered in circumstances which give to it seriousness and earnestness, and by such utterance tend to raise and purify our wishes themselves? Whoever makes more than this of prayer, I apprehend, advances into the regions of superstition. Pray as you will, it will not prevent mortal disease from fulfilling its course. Pray as the Church might recently, that did not keep the cholera from our shores, nor send it back from our shores. The expression was of worth only in one respect, as it indicated a serious contemplation of the emergency; and it was valuable, as it led to strenuous endeavours to deliver ourselves from that emergency. God, working in law, is honoured but in one way. Neglect the law, and you may as well neglect the Deity. In fact, what is devotion, when it is best performed? What low and mean conceptions of God are implied in the notion that he is to be wrought upon, like the unjust judge, by mere importunity—that man may, like a crying child, by perseverance wring a boon that is granted reluctantly, and only to still his noise! Is this a fit conception of the one infinite, eternal Spirit, the God of all worlds and of all beings? Such a notion of prayer implies a Deity of a lower kind. It may assort very well with our conceptions of saints and angels; it may assort very well with such deities as the Grecian and Roman theologies recognised of old—beings of like passions with ourselves, beings to be moved, to be changed, to be worked upon by cries and lamentations. It does not assort with the notion of perfect knowledge and unfathomable wisdom; it does not assort with the conception of a being who sees the end from the beginning, and with whom the past and the future are alike present.

Well, but, it is said, this notion of prayer does not afford the same source of consolation. Do we not crave somewhat too much after consolation? We have seen public documents at times, announcing that it gave the writer a great grief that it had pleased Almighty God to do so and so. When God's pleasure is man's grief, he has no claim to any large supplies of consolation. Surely it is desirable we should be placed above this. There is a complacency and satisfaction in looking around on all we behold as ordered by unerring wisdom—that wisdom manifesting itself in laws which have eventual good for their certain results. When is man more collected, more above the need of consolation, more surely in the road to happiness, than when he goes on, firmly relying upon known laws, in harmony with which he is pursuing his course? Thus it is, in faith and confident hope, that the agriculturist tills the soil, commits his seed to the ground, and buries it, there to be lost from human sight and sense; for he knows how the great system has operated in past years, and he looks forward to its similar operation in years to come. The engineer well acquainted with the laws of mechanics has no need of a helping hand; he does not look around and cry for some one to steady him when he crosses some slight bridge thrown over a mountain ravine or suspended above the roaring ocean. He knows in what he confides; he knows that there has been an application of those unerring laws which regulate mechanical action, and which insure mechanical stability; and he treads with firm foot and with unshrinking eye. So is it with the man who rejoices in looking round on the world as a great scene of law and order. For it is a fallacy of the imagination to speak of this notion of law as merely placing man in a world of unconscious machinery, of blind matter, of wheels and levers, which in their motions have no thought as to what it is they strike or what they crush, what they destroy or what they produce. The notion of a universe full of Divine law is not this. It is the notion of all pervaded by a Spirit that lives, and thinks, and feels, and provides, and guards, and eventually will bless in all; and then this talk of coldness and hardness in law and order passes away altogether as idle wind, undeserving of regard. In fact, what is the true consolation of the spirit? Is it to be ever wrestling with the Divine wisdom, ever unsubmissive, ever repining, ever complaining? Does it not attain its highest degree and its purest form in the ejaculation, "Not my will, but thine be done"?

By this view of religion it is harmonised with all things else. Throughout material nature we trace, increasingly and extendingly, the existence of law; in mental operation we trace it also ever more and more distinctly, although not so completely yet as in physical science perhaps; so that we may well infer the same plan and course within us as in what is without, and in what is most refined and most spiritual. There, too, we are still in a region of law—not, as I said at first, of external law, not arbitrary enactment, not precept imposed and enforced by pains and penalties, not mechanical law—but the law of the nature of the being—that law which bids the plant to grow, no external force being applied, no external stimulus—by which it becomes, from its first feeble and trembling existence, that which it is destined to be in its full maturity and loveliness—the law of our own nature, of our own tendency,—and this harmonised with all other laws. As in the material world, from the minutest atom to the remotest world or sun, there is still that same power of attraction or gravitation,—as we may say of it, in words which have been made familiar by their truth and beauty:

> "The very law which moulds a tear,
>   And bids it trickle from its source,
> That law upholds the earth a sphere,
>   And guides the planets in their course;"—

as we find this universality in unconscious matter,—so will it be well and delightful to trace, in the harmony of conscious being, a portion of the same system,—the spiritual not dissevered from the material,—the enduring not separated from the transitory,—but all combining together, and made to work together for good. We find in this ourselves at one with the universe and with the God of the universe. We look forward to futurity as the full development of the laws of our own being; we trust in their action to make humanity, entire humanity, eventually what is most pure, dignified, and blessed; and may we not reverently ascribe something of the same kind to Divinity itself? May we not believe that, in all his diversified works, God follows the law of his own nature, that nature which has been well described as "one great impulse to what is best"?

LECTURE VI.

WHETHER CHRISTIANITY BE A NATURAL PRODUCT OR A PRETERNATURAL INTERPOSITION?

January 13*th*, 1850.

CHRISTIANITY is regarded by some as a natural product, and by others as a preternatural interposition. It is regarded by some as a natural product,—that is to say, as arising in the world according to the known laws of mind, and the development of the intellectual tendencies of humanity, formed, in different circumstances, and in different ages, from various combinations of opinions,—sometimes limited and transitory, at other times, as in Christianity, extensive and enduring; while, on the other theory of preternatural interposition, held by the great majority, Christianity is the last of a series of interferences,—direct and immediate interferences of the Divinity with his own creation,—producing results and changes not to be accounted for by the regular operation of the laws which belong to the original constitution of the world. Now, it is very evident that those who hold either of these views of Christianity must feel very many objections to almost every portion of a religious exposition that hangs on the other theory. For these contrasted views involve a different decision of very many questions of theology, of religion,—perhaps, also, of worship and of morals,—and must enter very largely indeed into the mental combinations which are associated with different religions, or different forms of the same religion; and my present object is to meet the objections that have arisen from this diversity against the views that have been advanced here, by contrasting the two theories of Christianity, and showing which of them I think entitled to the preference.

The interposition theory of Christianity is this: That God made man perfect, in a perfect world, by nature full of wisdom, and endowed with all righteousness, and in a world where strife and passion and death were unknown.

That men fell from this estate in the exercise of an independent free-will, and that then the Deity interposed by punishment and promise. That when mankind multiplied upon the earth, wickedness multiplied also, and again the Deity interposed, by the miracle of a deluge; consigning the whole human race to destruction, with the exception of one faithful family. That when the Israelites were oppressed in Egypt, the Deity interposed again, by a splendid series of works, quite out of, and above, the order of nature, and delivered them, and made them the depositories of his also miraculously communicated word and will. That when the nations had again corrupted their ways, and were plunged into various idolatries, and all lost, "the whole world lying in wickedness," the Deity again interposed preternaturally, and became, in the person of the Divine Son, incarnate, and died for the redemption of this world and its deliverance from sin and vice; and that this miraculous work is continued by the agency of the Holy Spirit, and will be completed by the day of judgment and the consummation of all things. Such is the view of Christianity as a preternatural interposition.

In the view of Christianity as a natural product, man comes into existence feeble and erring, indeed, but capable of illimitable progress. He is at the first but as a child, with the waywardness and errors of a child; but he has tendencies in him for good, and a perception of the true and the beautiful which exalts him above his condition, and is the pledge of a higher condition to be realised in a future existence. By the natural growth of religious ideas in his own mind, and by the suggestiveness in which nature abounds all around him, he forms some conceptions of things not obvious to his senses,—"he feels after God, if haply he may find him." In different races of mankind, and in different circumstances, various modes of thought arise, all of them efforts,—though, it may be, faint and feeble in many cases,—efforts towards the attainment of more religious knowledge, of more spiritual perception; and in the course of things these flow together,—these different rivulets combine into one great stream, the contributions naturally tending towards that country or that race in which any particular object of human thought has been the most diligently attended to, and has been carried the furthest and the highest. Thus, while Egypt excelled in penetrating into nature's mysteries,—whilst the Orientals followed a more spiritual and speculative train of thought,—whilst Greece attracted to itself all that was delighted in by the sense of beauty and harmony which is natural to man,—theology was that for which Judæa was distinguished; and towards it flowed the knowledge and the best attainments of other countries. Starting with the great and fundamental tenet of the Mosaic law, the source of the most exalted religious conceptions,—I mean that of monotheism,—it imbibed from the East the conception of the immortality of the human mind,—it derived from other nations their moral theories fraught with wisdom,—many streams contributed to swell its grandeur, and to accelerate its course,—until, in the person and in the teaching of Christ, the combination of these gave a power over the world not hitherto possessed, led to the perception of common relations in human nature, and a common filial relation to the God and Father of all, which appealed so to mind and heart, that this religion became the predominant religion of the world. Still it was subject to modifications: the Apostle Paul, the ambassador of the Gentiles, advancing in doctrine beyond the point where the system had been left by the other Apostles and by their Master,—the Romish Church advancing yet beyond his speculations, receiving fresh accessions from different sources, until the culminating point was reached in the palmiest days of Popery,—and then the Reformation came to introduce new principles, to blend the rights of individual mind with the aggregate power of collective opinion, and to teach the world that there was yet more progress to be made, and that Christianity, a magnificent result of past ages, has not yet completed its history, nor assumed its final phase.

Such are the two contrasted views; as to which, it is needless to say, that my own is that which regards Christianity as a natural product; and that to the representation of Christianity as a preternatural interposition there are, I think, several serious, if not insurmountable, objections.

Regarding it as a preternatural interposition, I think the world would have a right to expect more originality than belongs to Christianity in its promulgation to the world. A God incarnate,—the All-wise, in human flesh, teaching mankind,—Apostles endowed with the Holy Spirit, that is, they also partakers of a species of divinity,—writers guided by inspiration, rendering them, as to certain purposes at least, if not to all, completely infallible,—and a body of believers, every one of whom is said to have "an unction from the Holy One, and to know all things,"—these assuredly raise presumptions of truths new, grand, undeniable,—truths to be found nowhere else,—truths never to be found by the world but for such interposition. Now, let the Scriptures be ever spoken of reverently, for they deserve it; let their moral beauty be ever appreciated, for it is most worthy; let their wise and wholesome precepts be regarded, for they indicate the path to happiness; but, nevertheless, I find not there the originality of great truth, not otherwise known, and not otherwise knowable. Where is it? Not in the Divine unity, for that came ages before to the Jews by Moses, Moses himself deriving it from Egypt, where they worshiped a Power that was, and that knew, and that did all things; not in the immortality of man, for that was an ancient Babylonian doctrine, and the Jews became aware of it, and proselytes to it, during their captivity; not in moral precepts of surpassing gentleness and goodness, for we find these scattered over the oriental nations, and repeated by their poets and sages with a voice that might well charm the human heart, without having added to it any supposition of a preternatural power conferred upon the speaker or the writer; not in theories which, whether true or not, belonged to Christianity,—I mean such as that of the devil or of demons, for these, too, were oriental speculations,—and the victory of the good over the evil was celebrated in Persia, as the final result and scheme of things, long before it was entertained as a Christian doctrine. Is it in the doctrine of the Trinity, so faintly shadowed, if it be shadowed at all, in the New Testament? That had its indications before, in the writings of Philo the Jew, and Plato the Greek. And sacrifice,—if we take that distinctive doctrine of many sects as identified with Christianity,—the virtue and the worth of sacrifice was a common notion, and we meet with it amongst all the nations of antiquity. There is not even a relative originality in these, because the Jews were in constant communication with the countries where these doctrines were taught, and where these truths—so many of them as are truths—were flourishing. Christ himself, we are told, in his youth passed some time in Egypt; and if he did not, we know that very many Jews did, and became familiar there with all that was commonly known of Egyptian learning. The influence of oriental speculations, derived from the domestication of the Jews in the time of their captivity, was amongst the most natural and inevitable of events. Greek was their frequent written language; and the Apostle Paul, at least, was acquainted with some of the best writers in that language; whilst the Romans, bringing with them the intellectual as well as the military and the political spoils of all the world which they had subdued, were many of them abiding in Judæa, were "proselytes of the gate," and gave, as well as took, in their communications with those who professed the ancient religion of the country. So that there could not be otherwise than such a knowledge, such a fusion of opinion, as we actually find in the first lessons of the Christian teachers. We see here the convergence of many rays; we do not behold the creation of light. We see a natural course of thought, of opinion, of knowledge; we watch it, like the growth of a river, enriched by the numerous streams which flow towards it, until it swells into a large and triumphant power, bearing its freight of merchandise, or of warlike navies, to the ocean; but we see this as a growth and an advance,—an aggregation, and not a miraculous interposition.

Another character of interposition, which, to my mind, is absent in Christianity,—the absence of which, therefore, is also an argument in favour of the theory of its being a natural product,—is efficiency. God is incarnate, and dies, and scarcely an historian records the fact, except historians who, being proselytes, were parties in the promulgation of the new religion. The world undergoes no change commensurate with the machinery which is represented as employed. In interpositions of a different character, we find efficiency. There is an interposition of judgment when Adam eats forbidden fruit, and from being immortal becomes mortal; with the power to produce food, the earth brings forth thorns and briers to him, and he earns his bread by the sweat of his brow. There is efficiency in the interposition in the time of the patriarch Noah. The world was then for its wickedness overwhelmed by the deluge, as narrated in Scripture; not one escapes. The waters pour down from the open windows of heaven; they gush up from the centre, through the caverns of the earth; and an entire race is swept away as one man. There is efficiency in the interposition for the deliverance of Israel. Plague upon plague makes Egypt one great scene of agony and dread; darkness covers the land; the animal and insect tribes become their tormentors; their very river, their great and fertilising and worshiped Nile, is changed into blood; and, at length, the first-born of all ranks, from the dweller in the palace to the inhabitant of the hovel, perish under the stroke of the destroying angel; Israel goes forth, and, on the borders of the Red Sea, raises its triumphant song. In all this there is a complete work; it shows that the task which was undertaken was fully accomplished. There is nothing analogous to this in the effect of the alleged interposition connected with Christianity. And is Deity omnipotent only for destruction? Is there no power of beneficence parallel with, or superior to, the power of inflicting suffering and of insuring destruction? Why, what happened? A few persecuted men long toiled, and gave the doctrines they taught a hold upon their country; one more learned, eloquent, and energetic arose, and he spread them, mixed up with many extrinsic speculations, amongst the Gentiles. The various points at which the teaching of these men touched upon the already received and dearly cherished opinions of the speculators of different countries, gave acceleration to their course; and yet, after all, the world was not regenerated, and the nominal spread of Christianity is allowed to be very distinct from any dissemination of its true and lovely and beneficent spirit. The morals of the world have advanced but slowly,—as slowly as its wisdom. We see no great earthly miraculous change to correspond with this alleged miraculous Divine interposition; but we see mankind winning their way by sore toil, by disappointments and by trials; sometimes with encouraging expectations, and sometimes with an energy which is nerved even by defeat itself. We see mankind thus winning their way to better notions, to clearer conceptions, to a higher spiritual, as well as, at the same time, to a more advanced physical condition. We see natural progress and natural result; not preternatural interposition and miraculous influences.

In a preternatural interposition, we should expect to find preternatural concomitants, and to find them in such a form as corresponds with the objects towards which they are said to be directed. For instance, in the preternatural theory of Christ,—of his birth, his nature, his character, and his work,—there are two things implied,—one relating to what was then past, and the other to what was then future; and in both of these, to my apprehension, the preternatural theory breaks down. The first of these is the theory of a prophetic life of the promised Messiah. The Evangelists continually identify his history with previous predictions. Of every action you meet with, "this was done," or "this was said, that that might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets." Look at the circumstances of that life: the alleged miraculous conception,—the residence at Nazareth,—the flight into Egypt,—and various other particulars, as comparatively unimportant;—these, it is said, were found in their prophecies, a prophetic narrative of the life of Christ, and this proves his divinity. But the one great distinguishing fact, according to the theory on which I am commenting, the resurrection of Christ from the dead, was nowhere prophesied. Of this there is no distinct assertion, no unavoidable implication, no intimation beyond the alleged obscure type of the prophet Jonah, who was three days and nights in the belly of a fish. Now, I say this omission is utterly incompatible with the theory of a predicted history of that life, in which the resurrection was by far the most remarkable event, and the event which very much, as to material circumstances, distinguished Jesus of Nazareth from other claimants to the character of the Messiah. I say, then, this leads us rather to the notion of a natural product than of a preternatural interposition.

Further, it was one prominent idea in the first form of Christianity,—the first form of all,—that the end of the world was near at hand, that it was to follow immediately, or almost immediately, on the destruction of Jerusalem, which many a far-sighted person had begun at that time to anticipate. And that this is not a forced interpretation, I will show by quoting some of the many predictions which relate to this event. In the 24th chapter of Matthew, at the 29th verse, after a description which is generally applied to the destruction of Jerusalem, the passage goes on:

"*Immediately* after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heaven shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

Thus does the prediction stand as reported in Matthew. In Mark we also have it, in the 13th chapter and the 24th verse; and there also it is a continuation of the description of the impending destruction of Jerusalem; it is taken up thus:

"But *in those days*, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven. Now learn a parable of the fig-tree; when her branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is near: so ye in like manner, when ye shall see these things come to pass, know that it is nigh, even at the doors. *Verily I say unto you, that this generation shall not pass till all these things be done.*"

The same prediction, in similar terms, is repeated by St. Luke; and we have it again by the Apostle Paul, in the first Epistle to the Thessalonians, the 4th chapter and the 15th verse:

"For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that *we* which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then *we which are alive* and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

These passages correspond with—as no doubt they are the passages which warranted and occasioned—the universal expectation of the Christians of the first generation, that Christ should come again visibly from heaven in their day, before that generation passed away, whilst those were yet living who were then converted. Paul identifies himself with the Christians of Thessalonica in this, and speaks of "we who are alive" as not preventing them who are asleep. It is almost needless to ask now whether this happened. The expectation,—the warrant for that expectation,—these are ascertained facts. The generation passed away; nothing of the kind occurred; and the preternatural character of Christianity is by this damaged as to its prospective allusions,—as, by the omission in the prophecies of the resurrection of Christ from the dead, it was damaged as to previous allusions. This, I say, is not to be expected in a real preternatural interposition; but this is perfectly in agreement with the notion of a natural growth of Christianity,—of the prevalence, for a time, of such an expectation as this; and when the season during which alone that expectation could be realised passed away, then, of other metaphorical, or, as they were called, spiritual theories intervening, and being superinduced upon these clear and strong expressions. On this ground, then, I think, the preternatural theory breaks down; and I will mention only one more objection to it.

In the preternatural interpositions of the God of truth, there can be no antagonism between truth of any other kind and that which is revealed. If Christianity were a preternatural interposition, and not a natural growth, we should not find in it any hostility to what has been subsequently ascertained to be fact by the progress of science. I do not mean that a religious revelation should anticipate a yet undiscovered philosophy; I do not mean that it should correct a previous astronomy or geology, or any thing of the kind. I think, perhaps, it may be regarded as a cavil to find fault with its adopting, for the purpose of illustration, the language of an erroneous and transitory philosophy. But there is one thing which I think a Divine interposition could not be connected with; and that is, with sanctions to false and pernicious philosophies, and with the creation of difficulties and obstructions in the way of the future progress of truth. Now, there can be no doubt that the language of scripture as to the figure and motion of the earth,—as to the relative position of the earth and the sun,—as to the character of the heavenly bodies which are visible to our perception, and their places in creation,—and also as to the power of witchcraft, the ability of demons to enter into the human form, and make it speak their language, and to become the directors of its speech and actions,—there is no doubt, I think, that the language of scripture on these points has prolonged error, raised most formidable barriers against the progress of truth and knowledge, and excited the persecution of those who were really and honestly labouring for the world's advancement. How slow has been the progress of sound knowledge and good sense on these matters! How many lives have been sacrificed in that struggle! What thousands—what scores of thousands—have suffered calumny, persecution, torture, death, for the alleged sin of witchcraft, in modern Europe,—those who accused them fortifying themselves, and strongly, by what they called Divine laws, which forbade the permission of a witch to live! What persecutions awaited the revival of the true doctrine of the universe! Copernicus and Galileo—with what care and caution, with what secrecy, with what enforced ambiguity, and with what fearful results—in the case of Galileo, at least—to themselves, were they compelled to labour, in bringing before the world those great truths now taught to every child amongst his infantile lessons! Even yet, who does not perceive that the progress of geological science has, at every step, to encounter difficulties from those who call themselves the religious world? We continually find it denounced as a species of infidelity, and its cultivators branded as atheists. Truths written in the unlying book of stone are declared to be profane stories; and those who interpret them aright are accused of contradicting Deity to his face, and uttering falsehoods which are inconsistent with that which they say man ought to believe for the salvation of his soul. I cannot hold that to be a Divine interposition which not merely tampers with a false philosophy, but creates a spirit of stern and unrelenting hostility towards the progress of true philosophy. "By their fruits ye shall know them." These are not fruits that bespeak a divinity of origin.

But these errors in science and in philosophy were unavoidable, if we look on Christianity as a natural product. There was no reason why, there were no means whereby, its teachers should rise above the science and philosophy of their age,—why they should not speak its language and think its thoughts. It was not that on which their attention was most earnestly and intensely fixed. If it had been, they would have been no wiser than their fellows; for here the greatest were at fault. The world believed absurdities till it outgrew its season of comparative childhood, and attained a better mode of philosophising, and till the use of more efficient instruments carried it onwards to higher knowledge and to clearer thought. And in this religion, of course, would partake. That the authors of Christianity should have fallen into the error of their times is natural; the consequent obstruction to the truth is also natural; and as the tendency of things was to accumulate in Christianity the best, truest, and wisest of what has been thought of religion by the world, so is it most desirable that it should be allowed to proceed in its natural course,—that the demonstrations of science should be accepted in their fulness and their conclusiveness,—and that we should look on religion itself as sharing in the growth of human thought, and coming, like all science, art, and knowledge, under the common law of human progress.

And that Christianity should be a natural product, harmonising with all other objects of knowledge, I think, commends it to human thought and human feeling much better than these marvellous and incredible representations. We may see in Christ something much more lovely than an incarnate God, according to the preternatural theory. We may see in him one on whom came the real inspiration of the ancient bards of his country,—whose childhood delighted in the magnificent strains of its sublime prophets,—who drank in eagerly the knowledge which had begun to be widely disseminated amongst his countrymen, derived from other regions,—the spirituality of the Persians and other orientals, the speculations of the Egyptians, and the artistical conceptions of the Greeks. We may regard him, I say, with more interest, thus growing, as we are told he did grow, "in knowledge, and grace, and favour both with God and man." We see in him, not the agent of a partial interposition, as limited as it was preternatural, but the brother of mankind, whose teachings were destined to go home to the human heart under every diversity of education, of climate, and of modes of thought; devoting himself to their service in life and in death; his religion, if destined to be encumbered with much that increased but did not enrich its stores of doctrine, yet capable of freeing itself eventually from these, and of shining forth with purity,—its course becoming clearer as it flowed towards its destination. We thus see Christ, in the subsequent history of his Church,—not in the anathematising spirit, but in that of beneficence,—not in the partial and sectarian spirit, but in the humane and generous and all-comprehensive tendency,—not in the technical veneration of a Deity invested with arbitrary attributes, but in the common and natural homage, the homage of filial piety and love, rendered to a God who is the Father of all. Christianity thus belongs to the world. It is taken out of the peculiar and preternatural storehouse of a peculiar race; and it becomes one of those great common benefits which, like the elements of nature, belong to humanity wherever humanity exists. We see in it thus a generous, a comprehensive system, which, as it has been enriched in past times from the theologies of the East, may be enriched in modern times from the philosophies of the West. We see that its course is indeed one of glory, and that tends to elevate our feeling of the humanity that exists in Christ,—that makes us recognise the equality of man,—that teaches us that as, in the system of nature, all men are equal by their birth, by their death, by their dependence, by their mutual relations, —so they are one, equals and brethren, in the sight of the Almighty Creator and Universal Father.

LECTURE VII.

THE MODERN THEORY OF MIRACLE COMPARED WITH THE BIBLE THEORY.

January 20th, 1850.

MY purpose this morning is to institute a comparison between the modern theory of miracle and the Bible theory of miracle. Though this may not directly apply, in accordance with the purpose of this course of lectures, to any specific objection which has been urged against *The Religious Ideas,* yet it has a distinct bearing on several, which I apprehend it is unnecessary for me particularly to indicate. The modern theory of miracle is this: That a miracle is a violation of some known law of nature,—that it can be wrought only by the one true God,—and that it is therefore an indication of his presence and favour, of his peculiar sanction to the teachings of the visible agent by whom the miracle may be wrought. This is the modern theory of miracle. The Bible theory of miracle, I apprehend, is, that a miracle is an extraordinary event, which may be produced by various powers visible or invisible, and which is not in itself a criterion of the infallibility or inspiration of the human agent at whose word it is effected, although it may become so in peculiar circumstances. Now, the difference of these two theories is evident on the statement. And the modern theory, I must add, is a very modern theory. It is the metaphysical explanation of certain philosophical theologians of recent times. If it has become, to a certain extent, the popular faith, it is by no means universally so; for the creeds of religionists of various sects abound in interruptions of the usual course of things, which seem to be of a miraculous nature, but which they ascribe to other than Divine power. In the annals of Methodism, how often do we find the devil introduced as a wonder-worker, as appalling the ear, or stimulating the corruption, of the believer by unholy and blasphemous whisperings! Even the phenomena of mesmerism have been ascribed, and that by teachers of the established religion of the country, to the interference of diabolical agency. Possession—subjection of the human organs and frame to demoniacal control—was, at no very remote period, the common belief of the country; so were the wonders—in other words, the miracles—of witchcraft and conjuration. The theory, therefore, does not ally itself with the history of Christianity. It is a modern device; and there can be no question that to read a volume written upon the other theory, keeping this in our minds, must most materially colour, and in some cases falsify, the records of that volume. In taking up a volume which is pervaded by the mention of events of a particular kind, if the writers hold one notion of the origin, character, and nature of such events, and the reader holds another, he will see the reflex of his own thoughts instead of the thoughts of the writer; he will behold things under different proportions, and with different aspects. It is like looking at a landscape through Claude-Lorraine glasses; you see on every thing a tinge which is not the hue of nature, you see a colouring superinduced which overbears the natural appearance of the objects, and their natural relations, in point of colour, to one another. It is as if we should gaze through such coloured glasses upon the snow and ice of the polar regions; instead of beholding them in their native whiteness, we might, perhaps, see them tinged with the most roseate hues, and behold a scene altogether in contrast with that which would be presented by the direct and natural contemplation of the reality. To understand a book, we must look at it through the views, the philosophy, the thoughts of those by whom the book was written and to whom the book was addressed. Else, I think, we are pretty sure of misunderstanding as we read and of misrepresenting when we expound.

Now, I say that the modern metaphysical theory of miracle—that it is a direct violation of nature, and can only be wrought by the one true God—is not the Bible theory. Neither its statements nor its narratives correspond with that; and if miracles are in some instances appealed to, it is because of their supposed extraordinary nature, or because of their supposed correspondence with previous predictions, or because of their imagined higher and more miraculous character than wonders of a similar species, to or by which they are opposed. For instance, in the recorded deliverance of Israel from Egypt, the rod of Aaron becomes a serpent, various changes are wrought upon the atmosphere and the river, and for a considerable course of time we are told that the magi of Egypt did the same thing. They might do it on a smaller scale, or in a less striking manner, but that does not affect the miraculous character of the operation. The narrative justifies and inevitably suggests the inference that the gods of Egypt wrought miracles by means of their priests, only that those miracles were not so extraordinary as the miracles of the God of Israel. But if this be so, it is evidently at complete variance with the modern theological philosophy of miracle. The law of Moses recognises the reality of wonders which yet were not wrought by the one true God. It recognises the power of witchcraft and magic. It deals with them, not as fictitious pretences, but as the reality of great crimes, and denounces sentence of death upon them. In the raising of the spirit of Samuel by the witch of Endor, modern commentators may explain away the transaction; they may account for it by the supposition of ventriloquism, or of an illusion practised upon the senses of the inquiring monarch,—but this does not appear in the record itself. We have there a real ghost, or a dead person revived, rising from the grave, and uttering a real and a speedily fulfilled prediction. This, again, I say, is quite at variance with the modern theory. And as we advance in the history, similar instances occur again and again. There is one, indeed, which may be regarded as fatal to the modern theory in itself; because, while it supposes an inspiration which yet is falsehood, it introduces the Deity as tolerating, if not commanding, that deception. The circumstance to which I allude is recorded in the 22d chapter of the 1st Book of Kings, where Ahab, the King of Israel, is misled by evil prophets, and the origin of his being misled is thus described by Micaiah, who in the narrative appears as a true prophet. Micaiah the prophet says to Ahab: "Hear thou therefore the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left. And the Lord said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner. And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the Lord, and said, I will persuade him: And the Lord said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also: go forth, and do so." It is not extraordinary after this that we should find the evil spirit, the great representative of all evil spirits, working miracles in his way. Under license, indeed, from the Most High, but still with a power which seems to inhere in himself, he destroys the flocks and herds of Job, his children, and at length smites him with boils and sores from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot. And this same power —with some modifying characteristics, derived, by association, from the theology of other nations—bears Christ to the top of a high mountain, shows him all the kingdoms of the earth, and places him on a pinnacle of the temple at Jerusalem,—distinct miracles, wrought, not by the one true God, but by the evil spirit. There is yet a higher sanction to this theory of the power of various invisible beings, of different characters, to work miracles, in the words of Christ, in the 12th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew and the 27th verse. It is when the Pharisees accuse him of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of demons; and he says: "If I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges." The fact is here allowed that the children—that is, I suppose, the disciples—of the Pharisees did actually cast out demons;—an indisputable miracle, on the supposition of the truth of demonology, and one to which we find reference in other parts of scripture. There is another statement, on the same authority, of the power to work miracles, as dissociated from truth or divinity, in the 24th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew and the 23d verse, where, predicting the various convulsions and confusions that should follow the destruction of Jerusalem, Christ says: "Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." It is here distinctly asserted that the false Christs should yet work real wonders. And that there were persons who, even without pretending to that character, did work what passed as real miracles, we further find from the 8th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, in the case of Simon the Samaritan. When the apostles began to teach Christianity in Samaria, they found themselves obstructed by this man's pretensions and miracles: "But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries." This is the narrative of a literal matter of fact. As a matter of theory, we find the Apostle Paul making a similar statement with reference to the apostasy which was to arise in the Christian Church. In writing concerning this apostasy to the Thessalonians, in his second Epistle, the 2d chapter, and at the 8th and following verses, he has this statement of the preternatural power which was to be exercised by anti-Christian teachers: "And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." And this miraculous power of the great apostasy is again recognised by the evangelist John, in the Book of Revelation, the 13th chapter, the 11th and following verses, where, describing the apostasy under the emblem of a beast, he represents it to be endowed with these same powers: "And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon. And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, and deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live. And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed. And he caused all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: and that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name." Here, then, in the most recent of those works which constitute the New Testament, and in the earliest of what constitute the Old Testament,—in them all we find this same theory pursued. They were strangers to the modern philosophy of miracle. A miracle was not to them what it is to us,—it was not to them an indication of absolute Divine sanction, which it is according to the modern theory. What by us are reckoned illusions, by them were reckoned realities; what to us are truths, to them were falsehoods; and what to them were facts, to us are impossibilities.

Well, then, if the modern theory be incompatible with the Bible theory, it cannot fairly or legitimately be applied in a religious argument; for such an argument is completely suicidal. In its success it destroys itself. By this theory of miracles, this philosophy that only the one true God can work a miracle, and that therefore it is a proof of his presence with the agent, and of his inspiration of that agent,—by this theory, those who hold it believe that they prove the inspiration, and the consequent infallibility, of writings which, when so proved, bring with them quite a different theory. You make use of this philosophy of miracles to establish works which destroy this philosophy of miracles. Your proof of their infallibility is the demonstration of your own mistake. If the Bible theory be true, the other falls to the ground; and if so, it is worthless, not only as a theory, but also as an argument. By establishing it, you establish the opposite principle,—the principle that there are various invisible powers—or, it may be, visible ones—in existence, that are able to work miracles. Once establish that, and you let in the miracles of all religions,—

all the miracles of all nations; you let them in as realities; you prove every thing, or else you prove nothing.

The effect of the Biblical theory of miracle on the writers themselves is very evident, and should be kept in mind in our study and interpretation of their writings. It is very plain that people holding the ancient notion, and not the modern one, would be much less scrupulous as to the evidence of the miracle; a comparatively small quantum of proof would satisfy their minds. They would reason something in the way in which, not long since, a friend of mine reasoned, who, believing very completely in mesmerism, quoted a certain wonderful thing to me; and I said, "Is there really evidence of that? Have you investigated it? Have you inquired into the proofs?" "No," said my friend; "because, believing in the reality of mesmerism, a mesmeric wonder, as it seems to other people, appears to me no more extraordinary than any natural event, any thing of common occurrence; and therefore I only require the same degree of proof in the case in question that you would require in the case of any familiar transaction." Apply this to the belief in miracles. Those who admit the principle that such wonders may be wrought, not only by the supreme Deity, but by various beings, visible or invisible, require no more proof than we require as to the common appearances and transactions of life. They would receive with ready credence what to them had none of the incredibility, or comparatively none, that it has to our minds. And accordingly,—even apart from the difference which there is as to the modern clearer comprehension of the laws of evidence, and as to our greater opportunities of observing the history and manners of different ages and nations,—even apart from this, which yet requires a very large allowance, we see, in the scripture theory of miracles, a constant predisposition to admit wonderful events without the strict inquiry which, in modern times, would most assuredly be instituted. And hence comes the phenomenon, which cannot but be observed,—that wherever you find a belief in miracle in the philosophy of a people, or their religion, there you find the occurrence of miracle in the narrative of that people and of that religion. The ancient Jews, the Greeks, the Romans, the Hindoos, all had this belief in miracles; and, consequently, all their books are full of recorded miracles. In the middle ages, in Europe, there was again the belief in magic, sorcery, and witchcraft; and therefore we find that magicians, witches, and sorcerers abounded, and that many people not only had the character fixed upon them by others, but bore it themselves voluntarily, and either boasted of their power or confessed their crimes. Wherever a principle of this kind is held, you may be certain the narrative will correspond with it. Man's thought, just or fallacious, wise or erring, will present itself as wrought out in deeds. A miracle-believing people will be a miracle-recording people; a miracle-denying people will only have the annals of usual and natural transaction.

Not but that, even in the most extraordinary records, there may be a certain nucleus of literal history, which will bear the severest test of criticism. Such is the case, I apprehend, with the character and instructions of Christ. There is a verisimilitude about them in which the preternatural appearances, when superinduced, are altogether deficient. Their reality being a moral reality, and therefore dependent on internal rather than on external evidence, comes home to the mind and heart of man. And it is easy to see how, around this historical nucleus, would gather the beliefs, the traditions, the legendary and mythical associations of the people, in an age when such things were faiths, amongst whom that historical reality was transacted. How easily, in such a state of mind, would a figurative expression become a miraculous fact! One writer, meaning to typify the loftiness of spiritual power, and the advance towards it, would say of a person that he ascended to heaven, to the right hand of God. Another writer, not long afterwards, would take this, not in its metaphorical or spiritual sense, but make it a literal fact, and, aided perhaps by his own fancy, would describe a corporeal ascent incompatible with what we know of the distribution of the solar system and the laws of nature. Then there are many miracles which are the accumulated distortions or additions made in or upon facts, in the course of tradition from generation to generation. There are miracles which exist in legend, miracles which exist on paper only, and which never had their prototypes in reality. All these will cluster around the literal historical nucleus, disfiguring and perverting it, and leaving to the diligent critic of a later age, not merely to apply and read it according to the light which modern philosophy lends to ancient time, but to read it through the light of the writer's philosophy also;—thus bringing the knowledge of human nature, its trials, its progress, and its exertions, to the interpretation of human history.

It is not by believing beyond nature, it is by acting according to nature, that man finds his way to true morality, to pure religion, and to enduring happiness. For the mind to dwell in a region of preternatural wonders, of preternatural beings, ever tampering with and violating the great, the wise, the beneficent laws of nature,—sporting with the bodies, minds, and circumstances of mankind, with their own strange and portentous forms made visible, and with their extraordinary agency in the works ascribed to them,—this is for man to live but in a dreamy and a shadowy world,—not a world akin to his own spirit, or in affinity with his own best feelings. It is when he comes to what is true and natural and homely,—it is when he feels himself as a man, living amongst his fellow-men,—it is when he has recourse to the relations and the charities of life,—when he walks upon the green sod, and looks up to the blue sky,—it is when he feels at one with what is most natural, and most holy, beneficent, and religious, because it is most natural,—that his mind is at ease, that his spirits are calmed, that his path is bright before him, that he looks with most thankfulness on the past, and with highest anticipations on the future. It is thus that he holds and should accomplish his natural life. The excitements of superstition are as pernicious as the excitements of war. They are not the proper nutriment of the human spirit. It seeks what is akin with itself; it seeks nature in harmony with its own nature; it seeks the divine in harmony with the human, the spiritual at one with the material. And, beholding them thus combined and blended, it rejoices therein, feels the impulse of natural piety, and raises its song of thankfulness to the God whose character and whose bounties thus come home to the human heart, and diffuse their influence over the variations of human life.

LECTURE VIII.

Physical Impossibility of the Resurrection of the Body.

January 27, 1850.

I have called the resurrection of the body a physical impossibility. That expression has been taken exception against as neither founded in philosophy nor consistent with religion. My purpose is to make a few remarks tending to confirm that assertion, to which I may add, that this tenet is as fruitful in theoretical absurdities and in practical superstitions of a mischievous kind as it is unfounded in the matter of fact. It is no reply to say, that the ultimate atoms which compose the human body may be preserved separately from all other atoms; or that, in the substance of the great globe, there must be material enough to constitute bodies for all the generations of men that have lived or that may live until the dissolution of the system. For, even supposing this to be the case, it is of no avail as an argument, so long as the fact is before us, that the material component parts of one body become those of another. No doubt, there is matter enough in the world to furnish out bodies for the millions that have existed, and for millions more that shall exist; but yet, even with reference to this, it must be observed that, if the future ages of the world correspond with the long geological record of its past existence,—if the centuries and thousands of years to follow since man first existed on the earth are to bear something like a due proportion to those which preceded his appearance,—then the time must come, however remote it may yet be, at which all the matter of the solid globe will not suffice to form so many human bodies as shall then have existed upon the surface of the world. It may be a remote time, but it is a time that is coming; and it must come, if the present system of things is to last. But I look to no such remote calculations as these, nor even to that more limited view of such calculations which might be taken by confining our regards to the inhabited parts of the globe, and comparing them with the human beings that have lived, died, and been buried. For instance, in this London of ours, graveyards rise indeed above other earth, but still they rise not proportionately; we can scarcely imagine that, within any reasonable compass, there is sufficient to furnish out the millions after millions who here have passed their lives, and who here have found their graves. It is clear that matter has lived over again; not only that the component parts of the present generation were those of the preceding, but that the same matter may have done living, human duty, from the time of the aborigines, for the Romans, the Danes, the Saxons, the Normans, successively, to our own days,—transmitting, perhaps, some qualities, by their inherence in this long succession of human bodies. But there are cases frequently occurring, individual cases, in which we arrive most directly at the fact, that what constitutes one human body becomes part and parcel of another human body; so that the resurrection of the two bodies entire is made, by this single fact, what I have called it—a physical impossibility. Such is the case, for instance, with the cannibal; at least, supposing him who riots in the unnatural feast to die soon after his victim. A portion of the frame of one is incorporate with the frame of the other; and for the two bodies to be raised in their integrity has become, by such action, a physical impossibility. And this is the case with death that is removed many degrees from that which the victim of cannibalism dies. What is the great source of fever and of pestilence in crowded cities? How is it that sometimes the air comes laden with poison from the graveyard? Why do those accumulations of corpses spread death around them? These poisonous gases, which, we are told, are exhalations from the bodies,—that is to say, which were portions of those bodies, and now become portions of other bodies, and which, as these in turn hasten to the grave, and are subjected to similar processes, still spread the poison, which, though not taken into the stomach, like the feast of the cannibal, is inhaled by the lungs,—still, these were portions of one human being, and are portions of another human being, and they interpose a physical impossibility in the way of the two coexisting in their material entirety. Removed by a few degrees, still the same process goes on, in the gradual change of buried corpses, their identification with the material element, and their becoming a portion of the nutriment, and so a portion of the being, of plants and animals which serve as food to man. These again convey portions of existence, incompatible with a separate and contemporaneous existence of the entire frames which are thus composed. We might trace this through many things, all tending towards the same conclusion,—all showing that whatever becomes of the vital principle when it no longer resides in the body, and whatever becomes of the material atoms of that body, their entire revivification as they were at the moment of death is beyond the laws of nature, or any operation confining itself within those laws, or of which the possibility can be conceived by our minds.

Nor is the resurrection of the body compatible with the hope of eternity. It is not an immortal body. Raise it in its best estate, and the seeds of death, and that death not distant, are still within it; raise it in its last condition—the dart of the last great enemy is in the heart of it. It is under mortal throes; it can exist but for a comparatively short space of time; a resurrection of the dead can be no resurrection to immortality. I do not, therefore, see any reason to modify or qualify the assertion, that the resurrection of the same body is a physical impossibility. It does not follow that the enduring vital principle is without physical organs; it does not follow that that principle is not a material, though to us invisible and impalpable, power. These and many other speculations may or may not be well founded; I only dwell on this one point—that the revival, for immortal existence, of a frame which in itself is constituted for mortal being only, and has death inscribed upon it, is not within the compass of physical possibilities.

Nor is this a Christian doctrine derived from the very first form of Christianity. We may find it in the second form—in the speculations of the Apostle Paul; but we do not find it in the narratives which we take as indicative of the first and purest condition of what was afterwards known to the world as Christianity. The bodily resurrection of all mankind has been argued from that of Christ; but how stands the case with the record? Sundry appearances subsequent to the crucifixion are described: they are not appearances from which the legitimate inference is the resurrection of a mortal body. There are two sets of appearances, or two circumstances, it may be, sometimes of the same recorded appearance—the one preternatural, the other natural. Of the preternatural are,—the sudden appearance without visible approach,—the as sudden departure,—the being seen at once in an assembly which was held with closed doors,—and the ascension to heaven. These are the preternatural apparitions. But these accord best, not with a raised body, but with a ghost or spirit; they have the common attributes of a ghost or spirit, and such as are most reasonably referred, if they are admitted, to that theory. The other set of circumstances or appearances are—the partaking of food,—the studied seclusion from public observation,—the remaining of the wounds inflicted on the cross,—and, after a few weeks of a changed appearance,—so much so as to render identification in some instances avowedly difficult,—the disappearance from the earth as if by natural death. Now, these point to the theory of complete death not resulting from the crucifixion, —of the thirty-six hours spent in the tomb of the garden of Arimathea—if so many hours were passed there—as having been the time when the vital energies were preparing to rally themselves, although they might not gain sufficient strength to insure a long continuance of life. The one set of circumstances answers to an apparent death; the other set of circumstances answers to the appearance of a ghost or spirit; but neither of them answers to the doctrine of a strictly corporeal resurrection—which, even if we suppose it to have taken place, would be no proof of the resurrection of those who lie in the grave, not for hours, but for years, and the elements of whose frames pass into a variety of other forms, and become scattered to all the winds of heaven. The fact is, that this notion of the resurrection of the body associated itself with the coming reign of Christ before the then living generation should pass away, and with the resurrection of the righteous dead to live and reign a thousand years over the world, which was so prominent a doctrine in that form of Christianity, and which implied this species of revival. The time for such an event passed; the Church modified its tone, postponed this resurrection for uncounted ages yet to come; but retained the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, whilst it had parted with what rendered that doctrine most essential and important to its theological scheme. And thus it is that Churches retain forms, when the essence and power with which they were originally conjoined have altogether evaporated.

I say that this doctrine is the source of absurdity, that it implies circumstances that tend to travesty what is most solemn in the notion of those by whom it is believed. I will take no representations of it from enemies or doubting friends; let us go for them to eminent divines, or to that great poetical divine of the Church of England, Dr. Young. He has endeavoured to work out the theory of the resurrection of the body in his poem entitled "The Last Day;" and he deals thus with the inevitable inferences from such a theory:

"Now monuments prove faithful to their trust,
And render back their long-committed dust;
Now charnels rattle; scattered limbs, and all
The various bones, obsequious to the call,
Self-moved, advance; the neck, perhaps, to meet
The distant head; the distant legs the feet.
Dreadful to view, see through the dusky sky
Fragments of bodies in confusion fly,
To distant regions journeying, there to claim
Deserted members, and complete the frame.

When the world bowed to Rome's almighty sword,
Rome bowed to Pompey, and confessed her lord:
Yet, one day lost, this deity below
Became the scorn and pity of his foe;
His blood a traitor's sacrifice was made,
And smoked indignant on a ruffian's blade.
No trumpet's sound, no gasping army's yell,
Bid with due horror his great soul farewell:
Obscure his fall! all weltering in his gore,
His trunk was cast to perish on the shore!
While Julius frowned the bloody monster dead
Who brought the world in his great rival's head.
This severed head and trunk shall join once more,
Though realms now rise between, and oceans roar.
The trumpet's sound each fragrant mote shall hear;
Or fixed in earth, or if afloat in air,
Obey the signal wafted in the wind,
And not one sleeping atom lag behind."

Now, this is not intended as a travesty; this is written in sober seriousness; and these are the genuine inferences from the theory of a revived body,—as if it were indeed desirable that the body should revive!—necessarily, in so many respects, a clog, an impediment, a sore hindrance, to mind, and a limitation of those powers of which man yet shows his possession even here, and which are capable of such indefinite expansion. Lord Bacon has justly said that there is not a passion so weak in man but that it mates and masters the fear of death; and it might have been added, that there is not a passion in man either but has a power so disproportionate to the capabilities of the body, that that passion may become the occasion of the body's destruction. Some men have died of anger, some of joy, some of love, and some of hatred. They have given innumerable proofs that there is in us a power of passion, as there is also in us a power of lofty thought and contemplation, in which the physical frame wherein these powers are enshrined becomes a mere clog, a hindrance, a limitation; and to suppose the eternity of this limitation is to suppose the spirit ever to be forbidden to put forth the full extent of its innate capabilities and tendencies. Perceiving as we do so much of evident subservience to the development of man's powers and faculties, and the great latent principles which are in him, we must believe that impediments will rather in succession be removed, than rendered the means of obstruction for perpetuity.

Neither is it consistent that the dying frame should be eternalised. We would make our delight in looking on those who have been known and loved in their best condition; we would have the painter or the sculptor send down their forms to posterity when they were in most accordance with the powers and qualities that, being enshrined in them, made them the objects of veneration or regard. And if the vital principle has other corporeal forms more flexible and better suited to its improved and progressive condition, surely this is what we should expect, and not that poor congeries of cellular and nervous tissues, not that corruptible and corrupting flesh and blood, which constitute the human frame at the approach of dissolution.

And if this notion be the source of absurdity in theory, it has certainly generated in practice one of the most mischievous of modern superstitions. I mean the total disuse in Christendom of that ancient, wholesome mode of sepulture by burning, and the substitution universally of the custom of committing bodies to the grave. What do we by this? The country churchyard may be a pleasant picture to the imagination in a thin population, and with scenery adapted to reflective purposes; we may wish that there the dead should gently slumber, decay, and dissolve themselves into natural objects whose beauty is in accordance with the recollections cherished of them. But in crowded towns and cities a very different result holds. There, what have we in these graveyards? A constant source and centre of pestilence. They are so many fever-factories, offensive to sight and sense, and with nothing to give them a soothing, wholesome, consolatory, genial influence upon the mind. There they are, retaining the factitious distinctions of life, perpetuating them, as if by way of insult offered by death to actual existence; there they are, connected with a thousand sordid and degrading associations; and all for what? Their effect upon the mind can never be to soothe, to purify, or to refine the soul. If we realise the condition of the corpse—

"It is as if the dead could feel
The gnawing worm around them steal"—

it is all cold, slimy, loathsome, and repulsive; and yet to this an absurd superstition appears to condemn society,—connected, no doubt, with this notion of a resurrection literally of the same body; and perhaps not without some apprehension, that if it were allowed to escape, if it were reduced to ashes, such a resurrection would not be a sufficiently easy achievement even for Omnipotence. Thus the living are punished for the sake of the dead; and what should be a source of some of the very best moral influences becomes only the occasion of some of the worst physical evils.

I rejoice to see that there is some feeling arising on this subject,—that there is even an association formed for the purpose of the members bequeathing their bodies to a more rational mode of disposal, eventually, than that which is commonly in use. There is nothing in it incompatible even with scriptural associations; for it was occasionally resorted to by the Jews, as well as the other mode of disposal of the corpse. There have been instances from time to time, keeping alive, as it were, the impression; the last which happened, I believe, in Christendom having been that of Lawrens, the first President of the Congress of the United States after the Declaration of Independence. It was a fitting connection, that of social independence with intellectual and moral independence, as implied in such a bequest of his own frame; and as the world gains more moral courage, and allows more to individuality, perhaps we may hope that it will still recur.

The anticipation of a future conscious existence is the result of instinctive feelings, combined with conclusions drawn from moral principles. It does not rest on the perpetuation of visible, tangible, gross matter. We have read of the prayer of a brave Frenchman before a battle,—"O God—if there be a God, save my soul—if I have a soul!" And there was a natural connection between the two instances of doubt, as there is a natural connection between conviction and hope in reference to those two subjects. Divinity and immortality are connected ideas. Human instinct, which leads man to desire and to crave for enduring existence beyond the grave, is of God's implanting. The natural emblems which suggest such a thought to the poet—these are the arrangements of his providence. The consolations which the hope ministers in times of calamity and privation are consolations tracing their origin to that same benignant Providence. The anticipation of futurity is connected with the filial relation of man to the Deity; and when he calls God "Father," there is an implied claim to his own eternal heritage. So that, whether for scepticism and denial on the one hand,—for conviction, faith, and hope on the other,—the notions of Deity and of human immortality have their natural relation. And as all around us are testimonies to the one,—as the greatness, the majesty, the wisdom, and the power of God are written in the starry heavens and on the surface of the fruitful earth,—so, intermingled with all such demonstrations of wisdom and of goodness,—to those who have enjoyed the contemplations fitted for the thoughtful,—contemplations revealing powers which are as yet only in embryo, whose greatest thoughts, words, and deeds seem but as mere seed to what they are capable of becoming,—there is the same indication that such is their destiny; and that, as "verily there is a God that ruleth in the earth," so verily there is a state of continuous, of progressive, of blessed existence, towards which frail mortality is advancing.

LECTURE IX.

THE ÆSTHETIC OBJECTION.

February 3*d*, 1850.

AMONGST the objections that have been urged against *The Religious Ideas,*—and the last particular objection which I shall notice before concluding this course, as I intend to do next Sunday morning,—is this: that the view there taken of religion is æsthetic rather than spiritual, —that is to say, that it relates to, or is supposed at least to touch, the imagination, rather than the conflict of good and evil within the mind. And something of this, it may fairly be conceded, was inherent in the plan of that course of lectures, which aimed at taking a general view of the growth—the natural growth and progress—of religion in the human race, rather than at a description of the special conflicts which may have their place in individual experience. Further than this, however, I do not apprehend that there is much justice in the objection. I shall commence with stating it in the words which have been employed by those by whom it is urged:

"God intends our nature to be built up and matured, not by the separate growth of intellect, feeling, or imagination, but by the wonderful fusion of all these in each single act of mind; so that the highest mind might, perhaps, be said to be that which most constantly *blends*, in their right order and proportion, all the powers and affections of our nature, so as to read off at once all the different messages conveyed by God to the soul, whether through the spirit within or the providence without. But, instead of this, we find that, by the fault either of education or of self-government, men's minds act piecemeal by faculties, and we have intellect and feeling and imagination setting up each on its own account, till creeds are at variance with feelings, and feelings with deeds, and our life, instead of showing all our faculties at once in their union, must have an act for each act, often mutually inconsistent, so as to mar the unity of the spirit, and deface the Divine image in the soul. Now, this tendency to moral development by the *successive* action of powers and affections, instead of the *simultaneous* action of all, though pernicious in all spheres of life, is fatal in religion. In other parts of life, if one faculty is neglected here, it is exercised there, when its predecessor again becomes passive,—and so, at least, they may receive their culture *by turns;* and though this is far different from their acting at once in the divine concert for which God meant them, yet it is not actual death; but where the *religious* life is absorbed into the action of a single faculty, all the others lose the consecration of worship, and, never being taught to bow to heaven, will become self-willed and unhallowed in their exercise on earth. Not the least, perhaps even the *most*, dangerous of all these one-sided religions, is that of the æsthetic faculty; for the lowest of all, were it ever realised in fact,—the worship of a mere happiness-dispensing being,—is so gross as to revolt every one; and the higher forms of utilitarian religion, which make ultimate well-being, not mere pleasure, the object of prayer and exhortation, really make so much higher demands on self-government and self-sacrifice of the will, as to be considerably raised above the empty and imposing worship of a religion of mere harmony or beauty. Mr. Fox's book seems to us so slight and rhetorical a statement of this æsthetic phase of religion, that, were it not for the attraction which this kind of artistic devotion has for many classes of minds, it would be, perhaps, no very useful task to point out what appear to us its moral and spiritual deficiencies."

Now, it is completely unnecessary to say to those who are in the habit of attending here, not only that with a very large portion of these remarks I entirely coincide, but that they have formed the substance and burden of very much indeed of our ordinary and regular teaching, in which one prominent aim has assuredly been to show the necessity of carrying into proportionate action all the varied powers and faculties of the human soul. There are, indeed, phrases here, such as "the successive action of powers," which seem to me to be scarcely correct if taken in their strict and proper meaning. It is not that man ever acts by the alternate exercise of powers, so much as that in him—and it may be characteristically so—some powers and some faculties are strong, and others weak; there is not the due proportion. It is utterly impossible for religion to be the act of a single faculty of any soul, unless that soul be dominated over by such faculty; and then the want of harmony, of proportion, and of truth which thence results, characterises that person in every thing else as well as in religion. He will be one-sided in literature, in politics, in morals; one-sided in all his tastes, habits, and occupations, as well as in his theology or his religion. Of course, the aim of instruction to characters of this sort should be to stimulate the dormant and latent faculties, and to raise them up into a due and proportionate exercise, that thus they may gain their due and proportionate strength in the constitution of character. This harmony of powers,—which, indeed, is strictly analogous with that harmony which, in *The Religious Ideas,* I have endeavoured to show characterises religion itself, and which it is strange, therefore, should have been made an objection to such views,—this harmony and due adjustment of the powers is what constitutes the perfection of human character. It is this which we most admire in the greatest men; it is this which so eminently distinguishes all those names that stand out in the world's intellectual annals, and that command homage, as if to demigods, from successive ages and from distant countries. In our own literature, it is this balance of fanciful and of logical powers, of feeling and intellect, taste and practical activity, which graces so preëminently the names of Shakespeare, of Bacon, and of Milton,—the three men whom our country has produced, and who have left transcripts of themselves in their works, that are most entitled to our regard and veneration for this combination, this due harmony, proportion, and adjustment. It is the production of this harmony, and these correct relations between the different powers, which is the great aim of education, when it is intelligently and wisely conducted. The teacher sees that some faculties may be left to the natural excitements, to the inevitable influences and impulses, which they will meet with in society; that others require care and training in order to give them their due place in the character of the individual. On these, therefore, he bestows his peculiar pains, varying the means which he employs according to the relative degree of strength and efficiency of particular faculties in the minds of particular individuals. It is this due harmony and full proportion of development of all which constitutes the aim and object of self-culture, which renders so necessary a scrutiny into our own mental and moral constitution, and which tells us where most to bestow our exertions, and to what point or object most earnestly to devote our efforts. It is, in fact, this harmony which surrounds with its beauty and its glory the world's greatest names, morally as well as intellectually, which shows in them the fairest combinations; for the greatest poets ever have philosophical minds, and the greatest philosophers ever have much of poetry in their composition. It is this, in fine, which constitutes the power of Plato and the moral beauty of Christ.

I have not described the religious ideas as the growth of the imaginative faculties merely, as the offspring only of that in us which tends to appreciate the lovely or the grand; but as the growth of human nature,—of the entire human being, in the exercise of all his powers, faculties, and tendencies. It results from the entirety of our humanity; and those ideas only present themselves with any degree of order, of truth, and of influence, as they are the results, not of a particular faculty, but of all that which constitutes the human soul in its diversity and in its grandeur. Imagination may shape them out, and give them a local habitation and a name; but they are the cravings of feeling which make humanity go forth, as it were, in search of these objects, which make the human being cry out for a Father in heaven who shall be his Friend on earth. Then the intellectual or logical faculty—the growth of science—corrects the aberrations of imagination and of feeling,—gives to the religious ideas more consistency, more rationality, more harmony; and, thus framed and fashioned by the exercise, whether successive or consentaneous, of imagination, of feeling, and of intellect, they assume the power of a practical impulse, and call forth the active faculties into exercise, making religion, not a thing of speculation or emotion merely, but of action, of exertion, in this world of ours; of good to ourselves and to our fellow-creatures.

It may be said, that a religion growing out of a sense of beauty merely would be imperfect. It may be so. A religion growing out of a sense of sin merely would be imperfect also, and imperfect in the other extreme. But from the one it is much more likely that a clear and comprehensive and well-proportioned knowledge should arise, than that it should be deduced from the other. If we look, not upon the individual mind merely, but look abroad,—look on the human mind in its great and grand developments, which constitute the intellectual history of our race,—we may see the tendency of those different principles to germinate into different forms of religion. The sense of sin may be developed into a religion,—a religion of apprehension,—a religion of self-condemnation, —a religion which knows no law of progress, but looks on man as having fallen from his high estate, and being now the victim of depravity, and the perpetrator of renewed transgressions,—a religion which grovels before a vindictive Deity, and endeavours to deprecate his wrath,—a religion which looks on mankind—the great majority, at least—as abiding under the wrath and curse of the Omnipotent,—a religion which works its way with peril and with fear, scarcely cheered by hope, unless it be hope within narrow limits, and on a technical foundation, and then of an exclusive and selfish character,—a religion which is full of gloom, and that stands on the verge of the world, looking down, with giddy head and appalled heart, to the bottomless abyss of a yawning hell. While the religion growing out of a sense of beauty sees man, in his feebleness and imperfection, still pressing onward, and still striving upward. It looks on the world as not under a Divine curse, but as crowned and irradiated with a Divine blessing. Its God is love, and his worship is love. It finds itself in harmony with the varied powers and beauties of the natural system; and it traces corresponding faculties and tendencies in the intellectual and moral constitution. It beholds all to be wondrous good, rejoices in the Author of that good, spends life in his service, and exchanges, by death, life for immortality, with a calm and bright and hopeful reliance on his universal and eternal love.

Now, that the view of religion which presents itself on such a consideration of the religious ideas as I endeavoured to take proves its own affinity, not merely with one particular faculty, but with all human faculties, is evident from this circumstance,—that wherever in a nation, or on a comparison of the religions of different nations, some one faculty has dominated over the mind and character, there the due and proportionate development of the religious ideas has been obstructed; thereby it has been modified, it has been perverted. It has been shown that an influence was at work in the development of those ideas which was not in harmony with them; that they belonged to the entire man, and not to man as characterised by the temporary and partial supremacy of some one portion of his nature. For instance, in ancient Greece, the religious ideas were overlaid by the undue predominance of the imaginative faculties and the tasteful impulses in the exercise of the human mind. We see this prevalence in their mythology: it produced their polytheism, and gave the forms and agencies of their divinities. Philosophy was a thing apart. Academe was not at one with Delphos. The exercise of the reason, the growth of science, were practically proscribed from interference with their mythology. The wildness of their legendary tales was corrected, when it was corrected, not so much by intellect as by taste. Hence the religion itself bore predominantly the marks of one faculty of the human mind above all others; and, however it might prevail for a time, it could not last. For it is the natural tendency of the mind to bring these latent faculties, sooner or later, into exercise. However strong one faculty may be, and whatever its seeming pretensions to universal dominion, still it is its tendency at times to stimulate the other faculties to exhibit themselves, and so to arrive at the due balance of the human character; and it is in this constant effort that the growth and progress of man, intellectually and morally, consist. So, when the world's intellect was more developed,—when science, the great representative of intellect as to the world at large, began to make its advances,—when sterner modes of ratiocination came into practice,—when philosophy extended itself from the bower and the porch into the concerns of common life, and intruded itself even into the temples,—

then we find that the mythology became "a creed outworn;" and, whatever may be sometimes said of the return to old notions,—of the revival of bygone faiths,—it is clear that when a religion has thus faded away before the gradual advance of the human mind, and a better and more just proportion of the faculties called into exercise, that then its fate is sealed for ever. It may remain interesting to the antiquary; it may leave relics that charm the man of taste; but, for credence, its opportunity, its chance, is utterly and for ever gone. Nor ever again, in the diversities of human thought,—never again, in all the vagaries of human superstition,—shall men, standing on some pleasant shore,

> "Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea,
> Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn."

They are gone. Standing on that pleasant shore, and gazing on that mighty sea, man will still have his visions,—bright and blessed visions; he will still have suggestions acting on his imaginative powers, and on his intellectual faculties also; but they will be of a different kind,—they will be of a higher nature,—they will be in accordance with that stage which he has attained since mythology passed away from the world.

The development of the religious ideas may be interrupted and modified by other faculties assuming a similar predominance to that which imagination exercised amongst the old Greeks; the development of those ideas may be overlaid by the domination of the logical power, as well as of the imaginative. It was so with the unbelieving philosophy of the last century,—that philosophy which was the work of men of mighty minds, who had their work to do in Europe, and who did it, though not of that kind which most commands the lasting reverence and gratitude of society. The peculiar character of Voltaire, and of those who fought under his banner, was not so much in the absence of all belief, as in the undue predominance of a cold and merely intellectual mode of treating religious topics, without regard to the character which those topics assumed when looked at through the medium of feeling or of imagination as well as through that of mere intellect. Voltaire believed a God, a providence, a judgment, an immortality; but then he merely regarded them intellectually;

his mind was at work on the demolition of the superstitions by which they were surrounded; he was always antagonistic, generally sarcastic, generally logical also. There were the religious ideas in his mind; but, by the predominance of this set of faculties, they were kept in a hard, dry, barren state. They struck no deep root, put out no fair leaves, unfolded no lovely blossoms, and bore no gracious fruit. That battle-field was a scene of antagonism; the power called into action was destructive merely or chiefly; and while it destroyed superstition, it left the religious ideas unsurrounded with any atmosphere, ungraced with any beauty,—so many dry, hard, isolated thoughts, productive of nothing which man regards with sympathy or desire.

But it is not merely in that form only, in the denial of Christianity, that this predominance of the intellectual or logical faculties has shown itself, and shown itself with the same results; for we may find quite an analogous case in that great reformer, John Calvin. Calvin was logical too; Calvin's religion was the result of the conceptions and the labours of his merely intellectual faculties. He wrought hard at propositions, and at building up those propositions into a coherent logical system. There is no greater exemplification in the world's history of the simple, stern, and continuous exercise of the logical faculties, than that which Calvin exhibited in his theory of Christian doctrine. He shrank from no consequences; an eternal Divine decree of reprobation had for him no horrors. He had no pleadings, no remonstrances of native human feeling; they were to him things to be utterly disregarded when they came into competition with that process by which he deduced one proposition from another proposition, until the theological chain was complete. And the sternness which displayed itself in the modes of constructing the Calvinistic creed showed itself also, when that creed was in its purest state, in a similar sternness in social matters,—formed the bigot and the persecutor,—the men who had no scruple about sending the heretic to the dungeon for reflection, or removing him from the possibility of corrupting the Church by consigning his body to the flames; and could even look on, and indulge the anticipation of those eternal flames to which it was supposed his immortal being would be consigned. Now, in these cases, both of the unbelieving philosopher and of the thorough-going logical theologian, the importance is not so much to be attached to what it was that they believed, or to what it was that they denied. Whatever they had of the religious ideas—and I believe the germs were in them, as in all mankind—was frost-bound, hardened down, incapable of vegetation or of product. And how unlike they both are, although with similar forms of belief and denial, to the luxuriance of Jeremy Taylor or to the lovingness of spirit of Shelley!

In like manner, the religious ideas have been overlaid, modified, and perverted, by being the results chiefly of feeling, without a sufficient corrective either in the vigour of the imagination or in the strictness of the intellect. Specimens of this kind there have been in the world abundantly, from the Essenes of old, in their contemplative and retired life, to the ascetics and hermits of a later period, who fled the world to escape its temptation, and lived and died in the wilderness;—from these to the Pietists, in their ceaseless desire for an internal communion with Divinity, in their endeavour to live utterly apart from the world, in thought, if not actually,—and the Methodists, with whom vicissitude of emotion constitutes the history of religion. Now, there is much beauty in this form of religion; but it is evidently imperfect. There is much of beauty in the sentiment which aims at ever living with God, sees all things in his light, gazes on the ray so earnestly that it becomes blind to the commonest realities around,—whose life is one sigh of aspiration upwards,—there is a species of loveliness in this; but how useless in the world,—how imperfect as a picture of religion,—how worthless as a practical exemplification of religion! It comes like a dream, and like a dream it passes away.

Thus, again, with the active powers: they have sometimes arrogated the exclusive dominion over the religious ideas; and similar results have happened. Mahometanism offers the exhibition of them on the largest scale. Mahometanism asserted power, aimed at conquest and at empire, subordinated every thing else, religious and moral, to the endeavour to subdue the earth to the confession that "there is but one God, and Mahomet is his prophet." It was poured over the face of the earth; it came flowing like a tide; its hosts went on shouting and subduing; ancient religions and modern religions were whelmed before them. They were a power in the world,—the splendours of which were attested by the grandeur of Bagdad, by the architectural beauties of the Alhambra, by all that is gorgeous in Constantinople. Mahometanism left its monuments on the face of the earth; great monuments they were, giving a dignity to its existence even in its decrepitude: but still it was a practical organisation, not a religion. For clearer discernment in moral science, for purer and loftier conceptions of the Divine, for all that in religion which appeals to the varied faculties of humanity,—for these it has done comparatively little. In the practical it was nurtured, and so fought its way to triumph and dominion.

There is another instance of the same sort in the papal system. There, too, we have, not so much religion, as dominion,—a policy and a machinery,—an organised hierarchy,—power, spiritual in name, but temporal in nature,—commanding the armies of kings, and having armies of its own,—employing their intellectual weapons with keenness, with perseverance, and under a discipline as exact and mighty as that by which the general controls and directs the movement of his forces. By that organisation it still maintains a fight with advancing knowledge in the world, and against the truth and love of freedom it still holds a certain portion of dominion. But it contributes not to man's advance in all that constitutes the best graces and attributes of his nature.

What is the inference from all this, but that the objection that the views contained in *The Religious Ideas* are simply æsthetic, and confined to the development of one faculty of our nature, in neglect of the others, is unfounded? For all history shows that their development has never well proceeded under the dominion of any one faculty, but requires them all to be combined for cultivation and for progress. It shows that their affinity is with the universality of our nature, and not merely with its peculiar phases. They have the variety with which nature herself is constituted: and in the views they suggest, what is religion but the reflex, the spirit, the sublimation of nature?

Any character formed by a partial influence of this kind shows at once how necessary is the due proportionment of our powers and faculties; and that which is illustrated in individual character holds equally true of the history of the human mind, and of the nature, origin, and progress of the religion of humanity. Creatures of mere feeling, of mere imagination, of mere logic, of mere practical activity, never, in any work however subordinate, in any sphere however temporal, however much mixed up with the things from which we are soon to pass away,—these never make the great, the harmonious, the admirable, the influential character. The same rule holds in religion. Nature appeals to all; and through every object without, and by the agency of every faculty within, conveys those messages from God to man which man should study as the volume of his duties and the charter of his hopes. Under the influence of such a view of religion, man delights in the contemplation of the universal; he finds nourishment in all; he grows up to the harmony of his own being; and as he does so, feels increasingly the harmony of that being with the world around him, and of all worlds and beings with their great Author, the indwelling, almighty Spirit. And thus nature and religion and man,—the present and practical, the invisible, the future hoped for,—all are made at one, portions of the same system, uniform and single in its spirit and tendency, boundlessly diversified in its means and manifestations. And thus it has been shown how every portion of that life of man, the religious life of man, has its emblems and its types in the world without us. The ceaseless movements of the stars in their appointed revolutions indicate his destiny to work, and to work according to eternal laws, though it be but for temporary results. The combinations of grandeur and of beauty in the phenomena of nature appeal to his imagination; they call forth his sense and appreciation of what is sublime and lovely. The different appearances of nature, stimulating curiosity and active thought, generating inquisitiveness into the sequence of cause and effect, and an endeavour to discuss the principles of things,—these are harmonised with that active intelligence within us which seeks to know, and ever to know more and more; and, as all man's life may be thus typified, so has an American poet beautifully shown that in the declining rays of the setting sun, and in all the diversified beauties of the calm evening, there is the emblem of man's passage into the night of death, hoping that to that night will succeed the morning of immortality.*

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* The following is the poem alluded to, being No. 58 of *Hymns and Anthems*, used at South-Place Chapel, Finsbury, published by Charles Fox, Paternoster Row:

"Behold the western evening light—
It melts in deeper gloom;
So calm the righteous sink away,
Descending to the tomb.
The winds breathe low,—the yellow leaf
Scarce whispers from the tree;
So gently flows the parting breath
When good men cease to be.

How beautiful, on all the hills,
The crimson light is shed!
'Tis like the peace the dying gives
To mourners round his bed.
How mildly on the wandering cloud
The sunset beam is cast!
So sweet the memory left behind,
When loved ones breathe their last.

And lo! above the dews of night
The vesper-star appears!
So faith lights up the mourner's heart,
Whose eyes are dim with tears.
Night falls, but soon the morning light
Its glories shall restore;
And thus the eyes that sleep in death
Shall wake to close no more."

LECTURE X.

GENERAL ANSWER TO OBJECTIONS.

February 10th, 1850.

THE objections to the views of religion stated in the lectures on the religious ideas,—both those which have been particularly considered in the prior lectures of this course, and any others which may be urged,—are all ultimately resolvable into three allegations: either, first, that the enumeration of the essential religious ideas is imperfect; or, secondly, that those ideas are not the natural growth and produce of the human mind; or, thirdly, that if they be so, still that fact is no evidence of their reality. I shall conclude the course which I have been delivering on such objections with a few words on each of these allegations, into which every one that has been or can be urged may be resolved.

The enumeration of the religious ideas,—of God, of providence, and so on,—I apprehend contains all that is to be found in common in the various religions of the earth, and all that can be traced in its simple form to the genuine dictates of human nature. But every adherent of a specific mode of religion is apt to blend his own particular notions with what belongs to the universal religion of humanity, and to claim for the tenets to which his sect or Church may be attached a place in common with those abiding principles that have ever been the source of religion and of its varied forms in the human mind and heart. Hence, were utterance given them, we should hear, perhaps, a perfect Babel of voices proclaiming that this or that essential doctrine was altogether omitted. The Calvinist would call out for the Divine decrees of election and reprobation; the Churchman, for the doctrine of baptismal regeneration; the Roman Catholic, for the Divine authority and power of the Church: and, if we go beyond the Christian sects, and include other religions, the Mahometan might plead for the efficacy of fasts, or the duty of conquest; and even the old Egyptian complain that, amongst the religious ideas, there was no notice of the death of Osiris, and the collection of his mangled remains. None of the subordinate tenets of specific forms of religion are entitled to rank on an equality with those great principles which have been enumerated; and there is, perhaps, but a single instance in which, with any plausibility, this form of objection can be sustained: and that is, that the religion of mankind is essentially the religion of a fallen creature, by his nature sinful and condemned, his life a scene of penal misery and suffering, and his whole race under the Divine wrath and curse. This, of course, must spread its colour—I should rather say, its gloom and darkness—over the whole theological system in which it occupies a prominent and commanding position.

Well, and is this doctrine of the fall entitled to a place in the same category with the ideas of God and providence, of human duty and human immortality? Has it any such pretensions? You may say that, without this, the conception of religion is not fitted for sinful man; and I answer, it is something to admit that it is fitted for the righteous man. You say, this is not the religion of England; I answer, by your own concession, it is the religion of Eden. You declare against it as the religion of mortal beings, and by that declaration concede that it may be the religion of immortal beings. You condemn it as unfitted for particular conditions of time or country, and thereby allow its fitness for the inhabitants of other worlds, if there be unsinning worlds, and for purer and higher beings, with whom man is invited to join in adoration. This is simply saying, that a religion without that doctrine is too good for those who make the objection.

But what was there in the transaction called the fall—if we allow its historical accuracy, as recorded in what has all the appearance of being only a myth or an allegory—to change the nature of religion? Religion would be the same after as before such an event. It did not change the condition of the world. Was there an eternal spring before? That is only a poetical, theological dream. The earth revolved on its axis, and fulfilled its orbit around the sun, just in the same manner in preceding ages. You say it brought death into the world; and the remains of countless generations that existed, that lived and died, through countless ages, speak from their stony remains to contradict your assertion. Religion is a thing unchanging even in man's changes. What it is for the good, that it is for the evil. What it is now, it must remain, wherever humanity may be brought into being, and whatever may be its adventures. We trace it to the enduring,—to the principles, the constant principles, of natural existence; and with these it remains, like its Object, "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."

This doctrine of the fall is not entitled to rank with the religious ideas,—I am not so much disputing its truth, as its importance and the relative position that should be assigned to it,—because it has not those marks of general recognition which belong to what I have classed together as the religious ideas. It cannot meet such general, I might say, universal acceptance. It is a doctrine of limited influence, whose origin can be discerned, whose history can be identified, whose prevalence can be measured and limited. It was not the doctrine of the ancient Jews. Whether they did or did not possess, in the earlier ages of their history, the narrative, the mysterious narrative, with which the book of Genesis commences, they certainly did not possess and cherish amongst themselves the modern mode of interpreting those narratives. At the time of Josephus, their more intelligent men regarded the serpent in the garden of Eden, not as the incarnation of an evil principle, but as a real animal serpent. Christ did not teach the modern doctrine of the fall, and original sin, and universal condemnation superinduced thereby. When he spoke of sinners, they were sinners, not from innate depravity of nature so entailed, but from personal transgression. Their wanderings were their own; and he looked not upon them as bearing the guilt of their forefathers, still less that of the world's great progenitors. The modern doctrine of the fall originated with St. Paul, and was matured by St. Augustine. Those two names suggest the whole history of its growth into that shape which it assumed in modern Christendom. And if we look beyond Christianity, still less do we find such a dogma received there. Many lamentations there are, in the poets and philosophers of ancient nations, over man's depravity, but still a depravity for which they hold the individual responsible, or the generation in which he lives,—not a technical depravity, a degraded condition of the whole human race, as a punishment for some offence committed in the outset of their being as a race. It is true that the ancients, in their notions, had a golden age, succeeded by a silver age, and that again by a brazen age, and so down to an iron age. But in this they did not describe the degradation of a race; they did not describe humanity as created in a higher position, and falling from that into a helpless and hopeless as well as a sinful and miserable state. Nothing of the kind. Their golden age and their silver age were different races, inhabiting the earth in succession;—a view which has its beauties, which may have a religious character, but which still is wholly distinct from the modern notion of the degradation of humanity from a higher to a lower position. I will illustrate this difference somewhat more at large by reading the commencement of Hesiod's account of the golden age, to be succeeded by the silver age and so on, from Elton's admirable translation of *The Works and Days:*

> " When gods alike and mortals rose to birth,
> The immortals formed a golden race on earth
> Of many-languaged men; they lived of old
> When Saturn reigned in heaven: an age of gold.
> Like gods they lived, with calm, untroubled mind,
> Free from the toil and anguish of our kind:
> Nor e'er decrepit age misshaped their frame,
> The hand's, the foot's, proportions still the same.
> Pleased with earth's unbought feasts, all ills removed,
> Wealthy in flocks, and of the blessed beloved,
> Death as a slumber pressed their eyelids down;
> All nature's common blessings were their own.
> The life-bestowing tilth its fruitage bore,
> A full, spontaneous, and ungrudging store:
> They with abundant goods, midst quiet lands,
> All willing shared the gatherings of their hands.
> When earth's dark breast had closed this race around,
> Great Jove as demons raised them from the ground.
> Earth-hovering spirits, they their charge began,
> The ministers of good, and guards of man.
> Mantled with mist of darkling air they glide,
> And compass earth, and pass on every side;
> And mark, with earnest vigilance of eyes,
> Where just deeds live, or crooked wrongs arise:

> And shower the wealth of seasons from above,
> Their kingly office delegate from Jove.
> The gods then formed a second race of man,
> Degenerate far, and silver years began:
> Unlike the mortals of a golden kind,
> Unlike in frame of limbs and mould of mind."

You see here clearly that there is a broad difference between this and the modern dogma of the fall of man. The first state of this most blessed race is still one of mortality:

> "Death, like a slumber, pressed their eyelids down."

The world becomes worse, but not by their becoming sinful: they are parted from the earth, they die, and their spirits become the guardian angels, as it were, of the race which succeeds them; and although a different state of being is created by the gods that people earth, and though these succeeding races may be worse and worse, yet when the poet, in his description of the last, wishes that he had been born much earlier or much later, that very alternative suggests the hope that even the last of these races may in time make its own progress, and rise to a higher condition. This is so totally unlike the dogma of the fall of man, that it yields it no support; it is not another version of the same theory; it is an altogether different conception. And it deprives that dogma of all claims to the universality, to the naturalness as to mankind, which belongs properly to what I have called the religious ideas.

Another class of objections is grounded on the assumption that the religious ideas are not the natural products of the human mind. One is entitled to ask, then, Whence came they? How did man arrive at them? This objection is urged both by unbelievers and by believers. So far they coincide; their explanations diverge. Unbelievers say that these ideas became so general by education, or by the tricks of priestcraft. But how explain this coincidence of the tricks of priests? Why did they all pursue the same course of fraud, differing as they did on all other subjects? If you say that these notions have been instilled by education, how came the education? whence such uniformity in beings also marked by as extensive a diversity? how came the first educators? So general, so common to savage nations and to civilised, are these ideas of God, and providence, and man, and futurity, that to attempt to explain them either by the frauds of a class or by the force of education—that education itself not being accounted for—seems altogether stopping short of any thing like a rational solution of the problem, and, indeed, makes that problem more obscure than ever. Because, if such be the power of education, why has not an atheistic nation ever been educated? Why has it never been practicable to keep men in atheism by education? Why has it not been practicable to keep them in any of the divergent modifications and specific forms of religion which spring from the original ideas? For this has been the case: wherever a specific religion has come into collision with those simple and common conceptions of human nature, there so surely have dissent and protest arisen. Not all the power which was exerted to uphold the Greek mythology—not the persecution unto death of those who questioned the reality of their gods—could prevent a pure theism from finding its sanctuary and refuge in the schools of the philosophers. And a pure theism will always find its way in different forms of religion. In Hindostan, in Mahometan countries, there have still always been those who were seeking after God, if haply they might find him, who entertained conceptions much purer than those which had become the established forms. There was many and many a protesting conscience in the Catholic Church before the Reformation. There was, indeed, much greater latitude of opinion before than after; because, while a tenet remained the opinion of individuals, and not of great bodies of men, the power and the revenues of the Church were not in danger—not in that state of danger which was the great excitement to the persecution of the first Protestants that were associated together. Every where we find indications of man's tendency to hold to these ideas; nowhere a satisfactory solution of the problem that stops short of their being the genuine product of his nature. Indeed, this is the conclusion at which the philosopher, on the survey of what is common and of what is diversified in human nature, must at last arrive. This is the notion at which—after various delineations of humanity in all its most different forms, of humanity as it exists in the civilised and in the uncivilised—

one of the great writers of late years on the natural history of the human race—I mean the late Dr. Pritchard—has arrived, and which he has, in the following passage, very clearly and emphatically stated. It occurs towards the conclusion of a great mass of fact, illustrative of the condition of humanity in every state and stage of civilisation. It refers to the great difference which he perceives between man and the other animals by which our globe is peopled:

"The changeless uniformity which prevails in the habits of one class of beings, contrasted with the variation, equally remarkable, when one generation is compared with another in the higher class, is a more really characteristic difference between the life of instinctive and that of rational agents. This is the distinction most obvious, and the only one that is obvious, to a superficial and casual observer. But those who look more closely into the nature of actions, and into the more recondite history of feelings and sentiments, which are the prime movers and secret springs of actions, are enabled to discover a more important distinction; and this is to be found in the very different scope towards which the active energies of instinct and of reason are directed. The energies of all the lower animals, the whole sum of their activities, excited into action by the stimulus of desire or aversion, according to different laws impressed on each species, are directed towards the present safety and immediate well-being of the individual or of his tribe. But if we survey the whole sphere of human actions in the vast field of observation which the entire history of mankind presents, we shall find the same remark can here be applied but in a very limited degree. On the contrary, there is nothing more remarkable in the habitudes of mankind, and in their manner of existence in various parts of the world, than a reference, which is every where more or less distinctly perceptible, to a state of existence to which they feel themselves to be destined after the termination of their visible career, and to the influence which both civilised and barbarous men believe to be exercised over their condition, present and future, by unseen agents, differing in attributes according to the sentiments of different nations, but every where acknowledged to exist, and regarded with sentiments of awe and apprehension. The rites every where performed for the dead—the various ceremonies of sepulture, of embalming, of cremation—funeral processions and pomps following the deceased in every age and nation during countless ages—tombs raised over their remains; innumerable tumuli scattered over all the regions of the world, the only memorials of races long extinct; the moras, or houses of the dead, and the gigantic monuments of the Polynesians; the magnificent pyramids of Egypt and of Anahuac; the prayers and litanies set up in behalf of the living and of the dead in the churches of Christendom, in the mosques and pagodas of the East, as heretofore in the temples of the pagan world; the power of sacerdotal and consecrated orders, who have caused themselves to be revered as the interpreters of destiny and as mediators between gods and men—pontiffs, vicegerents of the Deity, on the banks of the Tiber, of the Brahmaputra, and the Arabian Gulf; sacred wars, desolating empires through zeal for some metaphysical dogma, which the mass of those who fought and perished never understood; toilsome pilgrimages performed every year, during long successive centuries, through every region of the earth, by thousands of black and of white men, seeking atonement for guilt at the tombs of prophets and saints; immolations of the old and young, voluntary deaths of the aged, and sacrifices of children by their parents; the slaughter of animals for the typical or piacular averting of contracted guilt;—all these, and other similar phenomena in the history of all the barbarous and civilised nations of the world, would lead us to believe that all mankind sympathise in deeply impressed feelings and sentiments, which are as mysterious in their nature as in their origin. These are certainly among the most remarkable of the psychological phenomena which are peculiar to human beings, and which serve to distinguish the habits of men, not in their external aspect, but in their inward nature and originating principles of action, from the whole life and agency of the lower orders of creation."

Well, then, if the religious ideas have the evidence of universality, which ought to be accounted for, and if that cannot be accounted for by education or by the contrivances of the sacerdotal class of mankind, what other inference can we arrive at than that those ideas are native to humanity? There is, indeed, a theory which the believer, urging this objection, may set up, and that is a primeval revelation. But if so, we ask, Where are its records? Where is the evidence of its transmission? How came it over all the world? How did it penetrate into countries which remained for long centuries separated from and utterly unknown to the rest of the peopled globe? What authority is there for the missions and the migrations which must be assumed to account for this? And how does it happen, if the universality of the religious ideas is to be resolved into transmission from an early period, when the human race abode in the same locality,—how is it to be accounted for that they are only the mere abstract conceptions, the simple but intellectual and moral ideas, which are thus common; whilst the mere external observances and specific forms, which would most likely have been retained by tribes that fell into ignorance and a savage condition, are found as various as are the various states of mankind? Had the generality been the result merely of transmission, we should have found the forms as universal, at least, as the thoughts. I rest, therefore, in the conviction that these ideas are native to man, the growth of humanity.

And allow me now to say a few words on the last principle of objection—that their being so is not evidence of their truth. Now, to this I have already replied, I think, again and again in these lectures. Their being the natural growth of human nature is evidence of their reality, because it shows they are part of that system of nature in which we exist. They are not a chance product; they are not like those isolated cases which occur in the vegetable and the animal world, of peculiar forms, which become extinct with the individuals. Whatever is not natural in the material world soon passes away. It has no claim to being general—it has no prospect of being permanent; it is only the natural and the necessarily true which can be permanent. It may be argued that human nature, being depraved, is an impure source—that from this fountain can only flow bitter waters. But if so, we ask, Whence, then, our judgments on moral topics? How is it that appeal is universally allowed to the native tendencies of mankind in questions of moral truth and right? I would ask the advocates of specific forms of religion, by whom this objection is made, What becomes of all that has been called the internal evidence of revelation, and relied upon as amongst the best proofs that can be urged in its favour? Why, the appeal to internal evidence is an appeal to that which belongs to man, which is founded in human nature, and is the common moral result of the constitution of our being. It implies a superior principle in that which sits in judgment to that which is brought to the bar to answer for its own reality. The world has sometimes been called "a glorious blunder;" but if the general tendency of mankind to cherish the religious ideas be not an evidence of their truth, the world is scarcely so much a glorious blunder as an astounding falsehood. That which claims a common origin with whatever is most real and most enduring—which has the same source with the everlasting mountains, the infinite ocean, and the enduring stars—that which renews itself in the human mind, though overclouded for a time, as the spring ever returns, and clothes the earth again with flowers and verdure—that which is as natural a product as life in all its forms—must belong to the region of reality, and its conceptions must have their counterparts in the sphere of actual existence.

I have now gone through, in this last course of lectures, a considerable variety of topics suggested by those which preceded; and it is time to conclude this third course on the religious ideas—for such it has proved, and has extended to a considerable length—on this one general topic. In discussing it, I have been obliged to bring many topics under consideration which are usually reserved rather for the press than for the pulpit, even in countries where greater latitude of theological discussion is freely allowed than in our country. But I have not shrunk from fixing your attention on such points, because I hold it as a good that this mode of instruction, which seems so much in accordance with the habits and mental condition of a large mass of the people, should be directed to wider and more lofty considerations than usually lie within the limits of pulpit ministrations. I rejoice, indeed, in the growing prevalence, in our country, of oral teaching on important subjects. It does not supersede the press; it does not prevent or interfere with the quiet and meditative reading of the volume or the tract, and their attentive and fair consideration. It adds an impulse to the progress of thought, and furnishes, in its own peculiar mode, additional materials for the growth of thought. I rejoice to see that it is extending itself, and that qualified men are rising in various departments of knowledge,—in religion as in other departments also, though in others perhaps more conspicuously, —rising to avail themselves of this mode of instruction; and I hail it as an indication of the intellectual advance, which eventually must be a moral advance, that I trust this nation is destined to make. May those who are qualified go forth and prosper, in the exercise of the power and in obedience to the impulse by which they are animated; and may this form of instruction combine with others to destroy the remains of depravity, of ignorance, and of darkness, and to fill the world with light! Happy for our country, so proud in its long preëminence, so forward in other times in asserting the freedom of thought and speech,—happy if by this, in combination with other modes, the great body of its population can be raised to nobler forms of thought, to purer and loftier conceptions, to a more accurate degree of scientific knowledge, and to more generous, pure, and divine conceptions of the Power which rules the world and which pervades the world. In recent times Europe has seen a rapid series of arduous struggles,—vain, it appears, for a time, though not to be lost eventually,—Europe has seen a rapid series of arduous struggles for political freedom. Whatever our sympathies may be, we share not, nor have we occasion to share, in those struggles here; but let us do our part, and a worthy part, in harmony with such impulses, by endeavouring to realise throughout our land the destruction of conventionalities which tend to degrade humanity and to impede the emancipation of mind.

ON THE

HISTORY OF RELIGIOUS THOUGHT.

LECTURE I.

HISTORY OF RELIGIOUS THOUGHT: INTRODUCTORY.

August 18*th*, 1850.

I MENTIONED some time ago, in reference to the lectures which I propose to deliver at this period, that they would relate to the history of religious thought. That purpose I shall now attempt to accomplish.

I said, the history of religious thought, not of religion. Religion, like God, has no history. Like him, it is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." It is his spirit in the human soul,—that spirit, like him, unchangeable. Religion is always the same, always has been,—in the rudest times, and in the most enlightened,—in the most savage tribes, and in the most civilised nations. Wherever there is the venerating sense of greatness, wherever there is love and trust and aspiration, there is religion, whatever may be its accompaniments, whatever the traditions with which it is associated, whatever the legends in which men believe, whatever the sacred books they venerate, or the temples they build, or the ceremonies they practise. These are but the accidents, the outward forms; these, changeful as they are, may have a history; and it is to some portion of that history that I am about to advert. But the life and essence of religion are the same, in the most ignorant creature that bends before the rudest emblem or symbol of the Divine, before the scarcely carved stock or stone, and in the philosopher who worships his abstractions, and endeavours to realise the conception of a Deity without bodily form, a spirit, an invisible and impalpable power pervading all things. There are the same emotions, the same tendencies, the same reality to the heart and mind. It is not, therefore, of this permanent religious feeling, this one emotion,—the same at all times, the same in all classes of being,—it is not of this that I speak when I mention history, but of its manifestations. For this feeling, rising to the intellect, becomes thought; going out externally, it becomes action. The thought is doctrine, or dogma; the action, worship. And these, varying as they do under different influences—many of which I have endeavoured in a previous course of lectures to trace—under the effects of diversities of race and of constitution, of climate, of political arrangements, of literature, of historical events, of the existence or non-existence of a priesthood, and the extent of the powers of that priesthood,—varying under all these, become the proper object of historical contemplation. There, and there only, is their history; for there can be no history of that which never changes; that which, like Deity, or the religious principle in man, is permanently and essentially the same. Clouds have their history; the ever-shifting clouds, and the meteors that blaze through the atmosphere, and the stars in their revolutions, and the moon—"that, monthly, circling in her orb, doth change" —and the sun, with the shifting spots of his luminous surface,—these have their history: but there is no history of the unchanging firmament, of that sky which is over all, of that immensity to which we look up, as the patriarchs of the human race looked up before us, and which will meet the gaze of the remotest posterity. The primary manifestations of the religious principle—I may almost call it the religious instinct—in human nature, are those religious ideas which, as I have endeavoured to show, constitute the materials of all specific religions,—simple, identical, but variously developed under various influences. The manifestations vary as humanity varies. Increasing knowledge, purer manners,—these aid their clearer development, their more correct and felicitous combination. They make the religious ideas better understood, though not changed in their essential nature. We have found them as universal, or nearly so, as the most common physical attributes of human nature. And, beside that prevalence—that all but unbounded prevalence—which belongs to the religious ideas themselves, there are forms, modes of religious thought, which, though not universal, not so absolutely prevalent as the religious ideas, have yet obtained very extensive currency, have connected themselves with a great variety of different forms of specific religions, have attained perhaps, in common and superficial estimation, the same rank, have been regarded as belonging to the essence of religious thought, feeling, and action; and it is of these that I am about to speak in what comments I shall make on the history of religious thought,—of conceptions which are indeed but secondary, but which often claim to be primary, and are held as such; which have a large prevalence in the world, and occupy no small space in the annals of opinion. I shall endeavour, in reference to these, to trace wherein they differ from, how they are allied to, the religious ideas themselves,—what there is in them of true and just, what of false and pernicious,—and what are the views generally which should be entertained with regard to them; and this is the object which I shall pursue through the lectures that will be delivered here.

The principal of these are soon enumerated. The notion or dogma of *a fall* is common to religions. It is not merely in the commencement of the book of Genesis, it is in the commencement of almost all religious books, all books held sacred by different countries, and under the name of different religions; at the commencement of all, or almost all, we find the change which is intimated in those preliminary and mythical chapters. The Jews looked back to a paradise, the Greeks looked back to a golden age.

The locality where religion begins is in one instance a garden; in another, the chronology of religion begins with a change from a golden age to a silver, leaden, and brazen age in succession. Some such theory we find every where, generally at least. The notion of this change is very often made the basis of religion. The Apostle Paul systematised this notion; the Christian fathers pursued a similar train of thought. It is recommended as at the very basis of what is denominated orthodox Christianity; it is also at the basis of other theological systems, and may be regarded as a notion prevalent only next in degree to those more simple and general conceptions that I have denominated religious ideas. This, therefore, will form one subject of consideration.

Then, again, many religions have a doctrine of *incarnation.* God becomes incorporate in Christianity; Christ is said, in the Creed, to be "very God and very man in one person." The clothing of Divinity in human flesh is not a peculiar thought of Christianity; this, too, belongs to various systems of religion. The incarnations of Vishnu are amongst the most popular portions of the mythology of India to the natives who believe in it; and they look yet for the tenth *avatar* for the deliverance and regeneration of mankind. The Osiris of Egypt was an incarnation in flesh and blood of the greatest in their conception of Divine powers. The gods of the Greek mythology were already human; many of them were incarnations of thoughts, of ideas, of principles; but they again lowered themselves, and took animal powers. Every where we find some indications of this tendency to bring the Infinite within a finite compass, to see the Divine in the human. This, then, let us analyse, and endeavour to see what there is of truth or falsehood therein.

Naturally arising out of this has been the prevalence of the notion of *mediation*. As if Divinity and humanity were counteracting powers at variance, there must be some plenipotentiary to negotiate between them, and to bring them to an agreement. Mediation is the great office of Jesus in the Christian theology; mediation has been the function of other powers in other systems. Wherever a priesthood has existed—and where has it not?—this has been claimed as the work of the priesthood,—a work to be wrought out in various ways; but still, as originally the patriarch stood between his Deity and his household and slaves, so the priest stood between the nation and the God of that nation, or between humanity and the God of the world.

Again, there has been a prevalent disposition to *impersonate the principle of evil*, to exhibit it in some being, either rebellious against, or maintaining equal warfare with, the spirit of good. The Egyptians opposed a Typhon to their Osiris. The Persians had their Ahrimanes. Every local superstition has its evil spirits, its goblins, its vampires. And the Satan of the Jews undergoes a succession of transformations, from being a servant of Deity, the accusing spirit, to becoming the tempter, the rebel angel, the chief of apostate hosts, battling for the world, and for all worlds, with their Creator.

Another prevalent notion, and the only one which I shall add to the enumeration now, is that of the *efficacy of sacrifices, prayers, ceremonial observances*,—their power to change the mind of Deity, or at least to affect the operations of Deity,—their arbitrary and technical power to become cause and effect in the strangest manner, and by links unknown to science,—their operating upon the capacities of our own nature, and on the position of humanity. And this we find running through a great variety of operations, diversified to the utmost extremes,—from the prayers of Huntingdon, S.S. (sinner saved), for new garments, which, after praying, he used to find in his dressing-room, to the incantations of Kehama, with his sacrifices, by which he overcame the power of Deity, "and scaled high heaven, triumphant, like a god."

In entering upon such a course of thought, it may be observed that discussions on these topics bear a new character from that which has heretofore generally distinguished theological controversy. We are led into different regions of thought. We may be almost said to exercise different faculties. We do not discuss these matters as, some time ago, men did the points of the Arminian controversy, or, later, that of the Unitarian. There are two observable differences. In theological controversy, till comparatively of late, the dogmas whose truth or falsehood was contested were supposed to be peculiar to Christianity—to be, in common estimation, Christianity; and they were tried by the citation and by the interpretation of texts from the Old and New Testaments. But now, the advance of human knowledge, and a more becoming and generous mode of observing and estimating the thoughts of the people of other climes and other races, has made us perceive that these notions are not peculiarly Christian,—that they are not to be discussed as invested with any marked peculiarity which distinguishes them from all other topics of thought, but that they really twine themselves with many different forms of religion, and that they must be tried on their own merits, by their own evidence, and by their inherent rationality. The superciliousness of religious controversy is somewhat abated. We look at other modes of religion in a more fair and just spirit. We recognise the truths that are enshrined, not only in Christianity, but in Mahometanism, in Hindooism, in the Greek mythology, in the Egyptian mysteries, and even in the rude conceptions of savage tribes. We have learned to admit religion, where there is evidence of its existence—where is there not?—as a principle in the human heart. We have learned that modes of thought are to be tried, not merely in their dogmatic and textual and Christian form, but that they are to be looked at in a broader way, and in reference to wider combinations in the history of human intelligence. And, as I said, we do not try them by texts. The texts themselves are tried now, and brought to the test; if they be moral precepts, of that moral truth and instinct, that light of conscience, which belongs, not only to the Christian man, but to man universally. They are tried by criticism and history, by fact and science. In many instances they are corrected by the application of these powers and principles. And thus we find ourselves having to do with a warfare of a higher kind, with inquiries of larger and deeper import, and with an operation which is more intellectual, more philosophical, and altogether a very different thing from the technical controversies, from the little paltry squabbles, from the verbal analyses, of former times, which exist under the name of theological controversy.

And the spirit in which such inquiries are entered upon should partake of this change. Looking at theological controversy on the narrower scale, thousands have been frightened from it by the threat that their souls were in eternal danger if they denied or doubted the Godhead of any person in the Trinity, or the mode of salvation by vicarious sacrifice. And although such threats abated in their force, as it was perceived that the texts on which they rested were capable of other and more generous and just interpretations, yet still there is something of this kind; and a timidity has been generated in the human mind by long ages during which priestly fulminations have thundered through the air which it is well that the inquirer—if any one resolves to be an inquirer—should consider at the outset of his course. For these are not discussions and inquiries to be pursued with a timid, a vacillating, and a faltering step. They are not inquiries to be pursued under continual protests and obstacles in the mind itself. Such dispositions must be warned off, as the profane were warned away from the celebration of the Eleusinian mysteries. Let not those engage in them whose apprehensions dispose them still to keep within the tether of Church creeds or popular opinions; who cannot, without casting continually "a longing, lingering look behind," cease to think or believe as their forefathers believed. They must equip themselves for a more arduous course than this, or they are scarcely fit for it at all, and had better rest quietly in the bosom of their Church, or in implicit submission to some priestly director of their conscience.

But how fares it, it may be asked, with spiritual culture in such inquiries? But ill, it has been apprehended, does it generally fare in the regions and in the times of controversy; and there is reason for the apprehension; for few things have been more dead, hardening, narrow, perverting, than theological controversy to the religious spirit of man, and to the spiritual employment of his powers. The less of it, perhaps, the better in all cases. I can only say that in this case, having to do with principles, with reasonings, which are appeals to the elementary powers and dictates of our nature, it is, if one may so speak, a more generous and honourable fight than that which is bound up within the right interpretation or the right translation of the words of a text. There is something in the broad principles and spirit of the inquiry itself; and, besides that, there are the means and appliances which a mind, exercised upon such topics, will ever be more disposed to use, instead of less, as it would be in those addicted to theological controversy as pursued of old. There is still that companionship with the mighty thinkers of the present and past ages which tends to raise the intellect to their level, and to give something of their clearness of thought and their strength of heart. There is still that companionship with nature which man should ever cultivate according to his means and opportunities, holding therein more direct communion with the spirit of nature than he can in books or religious forms, however expressive or however reasonable. There is still also that communion with his own heart, which gave the first clear and pure thoughts of a religious kind a distinct form, and whose teaching is the same in our time, the same in all times,—the heart of man being evermore God's noblest altar. And it is, after all, not so much, even in this case, by controversy, or by the conscious exercise of investigating thought, perhaps, as by reflection, that man perceives truth when truth is connected with religion. Controversy, analysis, the weighing of evidence, the comparison of facts and dates,—these are the work of the intellect; reflection is as the eyesight of the mind, its intuitive faculty, by which it brings itself toward the true, the good, the great, the beautiful, and turns away from the false, the hard, the ungenerous, and the repulsive.

The notions which I have enumerated, and which constitute, as they are cast into Christian forms, the outline, as it were, of the orthodoxy of the present day, have generally—and especially in Christian history—shown that they were not of unchanging nature. They partake not of the universality or the permanence of the first manifestations of this tendency in man in the religious ideas. Those ideas, however, became better understood as man advanced in knowledge; their tendency has been to grow clearer and brighter, and with no returning course, no decline, or retrogression. Not so with these thoughts. We see them growing in ecclesiastical history; we see in their germ these notions of a fall, of incarnation, of mediation, of the personation of evil, of the efficacy of sacrifices, prayers, and ceremony; we trace them through events which form them more and more into distinct shape; we see them becoming a habit of thought, a system; and from that moment we behold them declining, gradually modified by the efforts of reason and by the advances of science and knowledge. For instance, in Christianity, these notions—first matured and systematised by the Apostle Paul—went on continually accumulating, as it were; there was a higher identification of Christ with God, deeper and darker notions of man's original change, and of its results; hence, more needful the interference of the priest, and more efficacy was ascribed to his sacramental and other interpositions. This went on till the system reached its climax, in the treatise of St. Augustine on original sin, and in the Athanasian Creed as to the doctrine of the Trinity. And from that time to this, what has been its history, but modification, irrationalities abated, contradictions mitigated, mysteries partially cleared, and rendered more credible? There was first the advance of mystery, of dogma; it reached its culminating point; and then its tendency to change became evident in a process the reverse of that through which it had been passing for centuries. But this attribute of change does not belong, as I repeatedly said, to religion, nor to any thing which constitutes the essence of religion, or which is immediately and distinctly derived from religion, and exists as a primary and elemental thought. There is no such change there, but nature's permanence in contrast with artificial vicissitude. Theological systems have grown and succeeded one another, as did the different forms of the temple of the Jews: the first, foreshadowed by their tabernacle of skins; then existing in its splendour of cedar and of marble, by the munificence of Solomon; then exchanged for a humbler building indeed, but one to which a greater glory was promised; then adorned by Herod; then doomed to destruction by Titus.

Whilst all this was going on,—whilst one form of temple and one material succeeded to another form of temple and a different material,—whilst the sovereigns and the priests and the prophets of the time gave the aid of their power, and did what they could to embellish it,—still change went on; Solomon's temple passed, and that which succeeded; and of that of Herod, not one stone was left upon another. While these changes took place, whilst temples and services passed away from the face of the earth, and while to all temples succeeded the mosque of the Mahometan, still the lilies of Jerusalem in the plains around put on the same beauty from year to year, flourished through all changes, teaching lessons of trust and love and adoration.

LECTURE II.

The Fall.

August 25th, 1850.

"All mankind by their fall lost communion with God, are under his wrath and curse, and so made liable to all miseries in this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell for ever."

Such is the doctrine of the fall taught to children in the Assembly's Catechism by divines in the Scotch Church, and generally adopted by those who hold what is called orthodox religion, whether Church or Dissenting. The ninth article of the Church states the same doctrine thus:

"Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam (as the Pelagians do vainly talk); but it is the fault and corruption of the nature of every man that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam; whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the spirit; and, therefore, in every person born into this world, it deserveth God's wrath and damnation."

This is the doctrine professed and taught in a civilised nation and in an enlightened age,—a doctrine which makes a demon of Deity, which ascribes sin deserving of eternal damnation to our very nature, which speaks of God as angry, wroth, vindictive, inexorable, even to infants; and represents his anger as lasting and blazing through the ages of eternity. Why, if it were not that the name of religion is a shield against common sense, we should feel it an insult to have such a proposition made to us; we should say —"Do you take us for stupid savages, and think that we embody our stupidity and our savageness in our theology?" A divine proclaimed, not long ago, that religion demanded the "prostration of the understanding." This demands the prostration, not only of the understanding, but of the moral sense also; it is offensive alike to mind and to heart;

and, but for the name of religion, as I have said, which seems to hoodwink men's minds, it would be regarded as a very paragon of deformity, and hooted from the intellectual world. To such things, however, forms and established faiths reconcile humanity, and bow the spirit of the intelligent. And how came this doctrine? By the long labour of ingenious minds, who, restricted to theology, and intensifying upon theology, as embodied in creeds, carried their intellectual energy into regions where it could only disport itself in absurdities like these; their labours having for origin the speculations of St. Paul, who first gave this doctrine a metaphysical and theological form, teaching that "in Adam all die, and in Christ are all made alive;" that we all sinned in the one, and are all justified in the other. In this speculation he had an object very different from those by whom he was followed; he had the object of extension rather than restriction; of brightness rather than gloom; for he meant to transform, by his theory, a Jew religion into a world religion, and to extend the relationship of God and Christ from the children of Israel to all mankind. An earlier form, and the one on which his speculations are based, is that which we meet with in the second chapter of the book of Genesis; where we read of the Deity planting a garden,—of his making a mould or form for man of the dust of the earth,—of his breathing into it, and so causing it to live,—of his taking away one of its ribs to create a help meet for the man,—of his appointing the man and woman thus formed to tend the garden,—of his restricting them from the fruit of a particular tree called "the tree of knowledge,"—of their being induced by a serpent to partake of that fruit, in order that they might "become as gods,"—of his noting and judging their crime, as he walked in the garden in the cool of the evening, and banishing them from paradise to toil and labour in a world that brought forth thorns and thistles. And this strange story has become the very foundation of one form of what is called the Christian religion, besides being also a not unimportant doctrine in other specific forms of religion, and having extended itself in various shapes over a great many countries, and found its place in a great many summaries of theology. This doctrine, so widely diffused in different shapes, must have had some origin common to human nature. It is not the invention of a particular priesthood; it is not the peculiarity of a particular faith. It has its origin in sources and influences which, especially in the earlier periods of the world, acted to a large extent upon mankind. The best notion I can give of that extent is by quoting pretty largely from a work lately published, a work of extraordinary power, of extensive learning, and of high importance. I allude to Mr. Mackay's *Progress of the Intellect, as exemplified in the Religious Development of the Greeks and Hebrews.* To take one portion of this story of the fall, the scenery of it, the garden of Eden: his section upon that scenery is as follows:

"The ancient Persians were remarkably fond of gardens. They were indispensable appendages of a royal residence; and the Persian monarch, wherever he might happen to be, could always command one of these pleasant retreats. The famous hanging gardens at Babylon were said to have been constructed to please a Persian concubine, who sighed for the mountain bowers and plantations of her native land; and luxurious gardens every where sprang up along the martial progress of Semiramis. Xenophon calls these gardens 'paradises,' a word of Persian or Sanscrit origin, often used in the later books of the Old Testament, and, in the Septuagint, synonymous with Eden. The Persian 'paradise' was richly provided, not only with vegetable productions, but with every sort of animal, bird, beast, and fish, for the king's diversion; and, as the extermination of noxious animals was as much a sacred duty as the rooting up of weeds and briers, the chase became a necessary part of royal education. Cyrus the Great is said when a young man to have been so keen a sportsman, that he destroyed all the animals in his father's paradise, and speedily became ambitious of following nobler and more dangerous game. The younger Cyrus imitated the divine Jima, or Achæmenes; with his own royal hands he laboured in his garden, and used to hunt for exercise in a large paradise at Celænæ in Phrygia. The habits of the Persian king, himself acknowledged to be a god, were formed by the magi after a Divine model; his empire was the terrestrial counterpart of that of Uranus; and there can be little doubt that the pleasure-grounds and diversions of the Medes, as well as the architecture of their palaces and cities, had a symbolical meaning, and were connected with the mysteries of their religion. The state of the great king was a mimic representation of the Divine majesty, and the royal gardens were emblematic of the original garden of delights which Ormuzd boasts of having planted: 'I have created, O Zoroaster, a place of delights and abundance; no one could make its equal. Came not this region of pleasure from me? no being could have created it. It is called Eeriene Vejo. It is more beautiful than the whole world, wide as it is. The first habitation of blessedness which I, Ormuzd, created without any impurity, was Eeriene Vejo; thereupon came Ahriman, pregnant with death, and prepared in the river which watered it the great serpent of winter.'"

The same writer thus finds resemblances and analogies as to the serpent:

"In another story, when Prometheus stole fire to benefit mankind, the latter were so ungrateful as to turn informers, and to denounce the theft to Zeus. Zeus rewarded the information by giving men an antidote against old age. This valuable gift was injudiciously placed on the back of an ass. In the heat of summer the ass wanted to drink at a spring, but was prevented by a serpent. Tortured by thirst, he agreed to exchange the burden he carried for permission to drink. The serpent thus became enabled yearly to renew its existence by changing its skin; man remains without a remedy against advancing years; and the serpent (the *dipsas*) still suffers the ass's thirst, and communicates it with its bite.

"The narrative of the fall attempts in a similar way to account for the peculiarities of the serpent, and for the aversion generally felt for it. An analogous story was current in India, and the homicidal serpent was said to have been condemned to wander for ever an unsheltered outcast. The well-known fact gave plausibility to the assumed cause; and possibly the Hebrew writer may have had in view the collateral object of discrediting, by the same sort of argument, the serpent-worship which so long maintained its ground among his countrymen.

"The peculiarities of serpents must have soon attracted the attention of mankind. They were viewed with especial awe by the superstitious; and a careful examination of their nature formed part of the far-famed wisdom of Egypt. The symbol thus anxiously studied was well suited to express the mystical and contradictory, its mythological celebrity being derived partly from the good qualities ascribed to it, partly from the noxious ones, and partly from their combination. The property of casting the skin, and thus apparently renewing its youth, made it an emblem of eternity and immortality; the women of Syria still employ the serpent as a charm against barrenness, as did the devotees of Mithras and Sabazias. The earth-born civilisers of the early world, Fohi, Cecrops, or Erectheus, were half man, half serpent, signifying the exuberance of nature, the earth's origin from water, or man's formation out of the ground; the snake was the *genius loci*, or guardian, of the Athenian Acropolis. The brazen serpent of the wilderness, perhaps an equivalent of the symbolical staff of the Egyptian Æsculapius or Agathodæmon, became naturalised among the Hebrews as a token of healing power; and by some of the early Christian sects the emblem usually appropriated to Satan was used to represent the Saviour, whose spiritual 'gnosis' was typified by its proverbial wisdom.

"But the serpent was as often a symbol of malevolence and enmity. In this character it appears among the emblems of Siva-Rondra, the power of desolation and death; it is the bane of Aepytus, Idmon, Archemorus, and Philoctetes; it gnaws the roots of the tree of life in the Eddas, and bites the heel of unfortunate Eurydice. Generally in Hebrew writers it is a type of evil, and is particularly so in the Indian and Persian mythologies. When the sea is churned by Mount Mandar rotating within the coils of the cosmical serpent Vasouki to produce the Amrita, or water of immortality, the serpent vomits a hideous poison, which spreads and infects the universe, but which Vishnou renders harmless by swallowing it. Ahriman, in serpent form, invades the realm of Ormuzd, tainting fire with smoke, and light with darkness; the kingdom of pure light becomes thenceforth shared with night, or divided between good and evil; the destroyer strikes man with disease, and pollutes every part of nature. The bull, the emblem of life, is wounded and dies; and the ancestors of the human race, tempted by the fruits which Ahriman presents to them, are made subject to pain and death."

We have seen enough here, I think, to give a clue to the way in which the story of the fall, as it is called, came into the world. There was the impression of natural objects, made more intense by early superstitions. Men cultivated and rejoiced in the healing fruits of the earth; they courted the shade of spreading trees; they revered the flow of mighty waters; they had an instinctive fear or hatred of the serpent tribe; they marked with it that sign of the zodiac which announced the dying of summer and the advance of desolating winter; and they shrank from their own destiny of a toilsome cultivation of the ground.

All natural objects, as I have had occasion to show in lectures here, leave their impress upon religions. There is scarcely an object in the skies or on the ground, on the surface or in the depths, on the land or in the water, which has not made its mark on some theology or other. The objects which are combined in the story of the book of Genesis are those which would naturally present themselves; and when these had been already aggrandised, consecrated, deified by those first forms of religion in which an unintellectual pantheism was the summary of theology, and men worshiped a power to which they did not attribute either intelligence or beneficence, but which they only knew as the raging sea, or the storm of the desert, or the benignant air of heaven, we see how the materials were all at hand for the framing of such an allegory, mythos, or whatever be the description which we apply to it as characterising its construction.

Not only were there material, but moral causes—causes existing in the natural history of the human mind. There is a period in all life, a transition period, when man advances both from the thoughtlessness and from the innocence of childhood at the same time, and finds his knowledge indeed enlarged, but his mind less in harmony with the best dictates of his conscientiousness,—a time at which reflection comes over the hitherto comparatively unthinking being: for childhood lives out of itself; it lives in the objects of its senses; it does not analyse its own sensations, or think of them; it thinks of things, and not of the impressions which they make upon its own constitution. It loves the tree or the flower, and hates the serpent, but thinks not of love or hatred, or even of those intermediate ideas which connect these emotions with their external objects. When man begins to turn his eye inward, he soliloquises something in this manner: "I feel that I am not as I was; I am advancing in life's career, and yet the advance by no means bears in all respects the same character. I am at times less in harmony both with myself and with things around me. My unconscious innocence has departed. I am not invariably true even to my own self-formed law of the right and the good. A glory has gone from me. I have entered on a life of struggle. I sin: I have fallen. I have partaken of the fruit of the tree of knowledge; I feel myself debarred from full and free access to that of life. There are before me years of toil, to be cheered by only a glimmering hope of redemption and happiness hereafter." Something like this takes place in many experiences. Something like this would be felt by the reflecting in the world's earliest periods, as well as in these its times of higher cultivation and extended knowledge. The fall would be the imaging out of a psychological fact,—a fact to a certain extent borne witness to by conscience,—and which would readily express itself, according to oriental imagery, in some such type, tradition, or mythos as that in Genesis.

What the individual thought for himself, mistaking in these very results—although they flow so naturally from the transition-point in his being—a real progress for a descent,—for, with the enlargement of the intellect, and the consequent struggle of the good and evil priciples, we have a higher being and a better than that of the mere unthinking, unconscious, unreflecting child—

"Pleased with a rattle, tickled with a straw"—

knowing little but what is external of other objects, and nothing of the internal workings of its own being,—this mistaking of a real progress for a retrogression happens not only with the individual, but with society. It is very readily transferred to the world from the individual, as the world's history shows.

"Man never is, but always to be blest,"

and always with a sort of mournful memory of a past childhood, in which he was more blest than at present. We boast of the inventions and discoveries and progress of our own age. It is universally agreed that we are wiser than our forefathers were. Are we better? are we happier? That is not so generally agreed. There are many who at once meet the inquiry with a negative, and tell us, not indeed to go back to the origin of society, but to take a comparatively late period for the purpose; and they say that the human race was then in a much better condition. Some philosophers have told us we were so in the feudal times, when the lord or chieftain exhibited an individual development of humanity, as to character and intellect, such as is not to be found in these regimented times in which we live—when the hundreds and the thousands clustered around their feudal lord and chieftain, his frown their terror, his smile their gladness, and his protection their security. Others, again, are, like the poet, alarmed at the first steps of that advance of commerce and manufactures which has done so much for our country, and totally misunderstanding them, linger in the shadow of a golden age a long while past,—

"The time ere England's griefs began,
When every rood of ground maintained its man."

As agriculture and feudalism have thus their golden age, so has democracy too, and chants of the time

"When wild in the woodlands our forefathers strayed,
As rough as the rocks of their isle,
Fair liberty wandered along the deep glade,
And decked every face with a smile.
They plucked the ripe berry-bush, and sipped the silver tide,
And with nature and with liberty their wants were supplied."

In reference to these states of liberty, of pastoral abundance, of feudal security, who is there that knows any thing of society who would not think that to go back to these, so far from its being a token of progress, would be to fall into barbarism itself? So it is with the world. The world's first civilisers and first civilised had their reminiscences, which seemed to them as a light in their own darkness. When the pressure of population upon society began to be felt, then they thought of the shepherd's life, of the hunter's life—how free, how rich, how stimulating, how much beyond their own; and they looked back to Arcadia, or to Eden, or to a golden age. War, as well as peace, had its golden age. There, too, men complained of degeneracy; for there were heroes in the antique time that could throw rocks whose weight would crush the strength, Homer tells us, of ten of the men of his degenerate days. Men have ever told this story, ever felt this illusion; and some have had philosophy enough to see that it is a delusion. It is one form of that discontent with the present which is the result of man's powers being superior to his circumstances,—of his capacity and his disposition ever to image forth in his mind something grander, greater, purer, lovelier, than what he traces in things around him,—which is his great incitement to look for the future, as it is the source of his visions of the past. The golden age is but the shadow which aspiration, labouring for its upward flight, throws backward.

And it is not unnatural that, in reflecting on his condition, as I have described the individual, there should be a propensity to self-excuse, or a combination of the acknowledgment of blame with the disclaimer of blameworthiness. At first, men laid it on God, or the gods, or fate. The heroes of Greek tragedy—Œdipus, for instance—charge any and every crime, not upon themselves, but on Divinity. The Hebrew God is one, forms the light and creates the darkness also, gives good and evil, sends forth pure angels and lying spirits, softens the hearts of some and hardens those of others. Soon, however, the progress of the idea of God in men's minds would make them shrink back from this; they would wish to excuse themselves, but without directly inculpating Deity; and this would stimulate a number of inventions and sophisms. "Who did it?" "How was it?" "The serpent tempted me:" there was an excuse. "He tempted the woman first, and she persuaded me, and I did eat:" there is the excuse removed one degree further. And this poor paltering of man's mind, this seeking to throw off what perplexes him in his own nature upon something extrinsic, this transparent fallacy, this cowardice and sophistry, has been enshrined in religion. We sometimes hear it said, how much religion has done for woman! How much, indeed! It did not begin with doing well for her. The fall of the world was thrown upon her by the sophistry and cowardice of humanity. It made her the slave in the East of gross passions, the slave in the West of flimsy conventionalities; and in both, casts upon her all the crimes which humanity suffers from the abuse of superior strength, from tyranny and oppression.

Man is ever falling, but he is also ever rising, and yet higher and higher. On humanity the law of progression ever operates. A seeming retrogression always precedes a real advance. In philosophical history, ages of belief and unity alternate with ages of scepticism and of critical analysis. Man takes the fruit of knowledge, and becomes self-accused for his work; he shrinks from toil, without seeing that it is a blessing, one of the greatest of blessings, though described as a curse. His mind still outstrips the actualities of existence; and in that gives evidence, not that he has fallen, but that his destiny is to advance and to rise. His course is onwards and upwards. The tree of knowledge grows still; the tree of life—of "all that makes it life to live"—is still planted on the earth; and over neither of them do we fear the watching of a jealous God. Men have access to the one and to the other: they eat of both; their science advances; their knowledge of life in its purport and objects, and their realisation and enjoyment of that purport and objects, are advancing also. The trees bear their fruit, a rich harvest; man eats, and is not satisfied,—for he longs for yet more knowledge and a yet higher degree of life. He plants gardens far beyond the Eden of antiquity; but not in their enjoyment is he content to rest, but would make the earth yet more richly and abundantly to blossom as the rose. Such is the beneficent law of his being. And in virtue of that, he can trace these legends of the past, which superstition has consecrated with its homage and fenced with its terrors,—he can trace them, and enjoy what there is in them of wisdom and of poetry, longing for a yet profounder wisdom and for a yet higher poetry, and that which they will bring him—a purer and a brighter religion.

LECTURE III.

Divine Incarnation.

September 1*st*, 1850.

There is a verse in one of Watts's hymns which I have no doubt the good doctor wrote under a strong persuasion that he was expressing a peculiar and intensely Christian sentiment, and yet which, in fact, contains the leading ideas of most of the world's mythologies where they became specific religions. The verse I mean is this:

"Till God in human flesh I see,
  My thoughts no comfort find;
The holy, just, and sacred Three
  Are terrors to my mind."

Now, here is the very essence of mythology, as distinguishable from the pure spirit of religion. Here is plurality in Deity,—polytheism, as far as it goes,—here is that Divine triplicity in the Supreme which we meet with in the gods of Egypt, of India, and of Greece,—here is that union of divine spirit, and of human flesh—incarnation—which is prevalent in most mythologies,—and here is also, and worst of all, that connection of terror, and, therefore, of a servile spirit, in religion, too apt to degenerate into cruelty, which belongs even to mythologies rather in their more barbarous conditions than when they become associated with higher degrees of intellect. And this same doctrine of incarnation, to single it out from the rest, is yet further delineated in another hymn, by the same author, in which it is brought very distinctly before us,—as distinctly as, and more impressively than, in the Athanasian Creed, or similar compositions. I allude to the hymn which runs thus:

"Come, all-harmonious tongue,
  Your noblest music bring;
'Tis Christ the everlasting God
  And Christ the man we sing.

Tell how he took our flesh,
  To take away our guilt;
Sing the dear drops of sacred blood,
  That hellish monsters spilt.

Down to the shades of death
  He bowed his awful head;
But he arose to live and reign
  When death itself is dead.

No more the bloody spear,
  The nails, the cross no more;
For hell itself shakes at his name,
  And all the heavens adore."

Grandly expressed, I think; but with grandeur which is essentially mythological,—which humanises God while it celebrates the apotheosis of humanity,—which belongs to tendencies of the human mind that we trace in history most strongly in the darkest ages, and gradually giving way with the progress of intelligence. For, as I have said, religions all have their incarnations; nor shall I stop on this occasion to show how thoroughly interwoven with the systems of Egypt and of India was the notion of divine persons taking flesh, and thereby destroying human guilt. Nay, the tendency is not merely to be traced there. Personification and corporalisation of incarnation are notions so closely connected, that they were ever prone to run the one into the other. Men, in delineating Deity as a person, almost invariably made him a human person; and hence the frequency with which we meet with the notion even of a dying god. And in the conception which was most separated from thoughts like these,—the Jehovah of the Jews,—how much of the corporeal do we find connected with him in the Old Testament! When sacrifice is offered, he smells a sweet savour; when the sultry summer day closes, he walks in the garden in the cool of the evening; when he is presented to the imagination, it is as a venerable personage,—"the Ancient of Days." Every where there is the tendency which at last took its strongest form in the actual identification of the infinite Spirit with the man Jesus of Nazareth. And this same tendency acts upon the world of imagination and of literature. How many beautiful stories—mere fictions though they be, yet, perchance, with truth veiled in them—have we, like that of Undine, in which some being, belonging to the spiritual world, assumes the human shape and mode of existence, and with it the infirmities of humanity. These all show an endeavour, a striving in the human mind, for an approximation towards the Divine. They are one mode in which that earnest craving has most generally developed itself. Man takes his conceptions of God from something which is obvious to his senses: he reasons upon it; and as he reasons, the idea is aggrandised,—it becomes more majestic, and it becomes also more remote; he is uneasy in the sense of this distance,—he strives to draw nearer the object of his adoration,—he approaches it, not only in homage, but in his notions, and in adapting these as much as possible to the production of a greater degree of affinity and of sympathy. And never has this been more elaborated than in the history of the Christian Church. The quasi-historical portions of religion have not been left in Christianity—as they were in other systems—to the free range of the poets, and to the general and indiscriminate adoption of popular legend. They were confined within much narrower limits, and they were subjected to a much severer mental exercise. There have been the same processes in relation to the doctrine of Divine incarnation in Christianity, that I adverted to last Sunday in the lecture upon the fall. A series of acute minds were, from age to age, stimulated to most earnest exercise upon it: they tried the doctrine in all its bearings,—they were ever oppressed with the difficulty, the increasing difficulty, arising from purer and higher conceptions of God. They put forth their power to struggle with this difficulty,—to retain the greatness, and yet to provide for the nearness; and hence those elaborated theories which ended, as their final result, in a description of Christ as being one person; and in that one person having two natures; and in one of those two natures having again three persons,—a complication which may defy any theory of the constitution of being to produce its parallel.

I am treating this matter, as you are aware, historically rather than theologically. The notion of Divine incarnation, thus developed, has wrought abundant mischief in the world; I do not say unmixed mischief, for I shall presently show that it was not so; but it has wrought abundant mischief. It has filled the gospel narratives with perplexities, contradictions, and absurdities. Including even the preternatural portions of those narratives, still they record the life, the sayings, and the doings of a man,—of one touched with the feeling of our infirmities,—a man of like passions with ourselves,—a proper human being, to whose knowledge and to whose power there were bounds. And the difficulty, the impossibility, of making all the portions of such a narrative, and every expression therein, bend to a theory which is essentially at variance with it,—what equivocation has this not induced,—what word-squeezing, what hair-splitting, what tampering with the fidelity of man's own mind and intellect,—in order to work that out of words which evidently could not be their original, as it is not their natural, import.

Another evil result of this notion has been the isolation of Christianity from other religions, in a much larger degree than it is probable would otherwise have happened, and the placing of it in a position of hostility towards them. Especially is this the case with respect to Judaism: Judaism, the very source of Christianity,—Judaism, in which all that at the outset belonged to Christianity was to be distinctly traced, in its germ at least,—Judaism, between which and Christianity there is a natural affinity, the affiliation of the one upon the other, of which it is, indeed, only the full growth and development. Yet the two religions have been placed by this doctrine in a relation of antagonism—one may say, of hatred—to one another,—one party condemning the other for idolatry, and the other retorting the charge of blasphemy and unbelief. And this sort of personation of the Deity in Christ, and the attempted identification with his recorded history, has isolated Christianity from other systems, so as to bar the hope of gradual approximation by the progress of intellect; it has made Christianity antagonistic, until we see the cross blazing on the banners of armies, and even decking the hilt of the sword forged for the purpose of shedding the blood of a fellow-creature.

Nor has this doctrine been without the evil of inducing a species of idolatry which seems, when once introduced, to pervade the system. God is habitually spoken of in human form; human organs are habitually ascribed to him.

This can scarcely fail to bring with it the attributing also to him of a certain portion of human passions, even of those passions which are least connected with the well-being, the nobleness, and the progress of our nature. And, further, it has tended to concentrate all attributes of love, and all feelings of affection and of gratitude, upon the incarnate portion of Divinity, leaving to him who is still called the Father only the sterner attributes and functions of wrath and judgment.

These have been the evils; but who shall say that they have been unmixed evils? Who can say that, when we think of the millions who, unless they had possessed such a man-God, would scarcely have had a God at all? How confident they have felt in the sympathy of one who could thus be touched with the feeling of their infirmities! How have their eyes streamed with tears at the affecting and impressive record of his sufferings! How have they magnified the love which he evinced to man; and have regarded love to him as the seal and the proof of their own spirituality,—of their own best existence! Their trust, their hopes, their outward and upward tendencies, have thus been stimulated; and, no doubt, intermingling with the dark mischiefs that flowed, there has been also a great amount of good spreading itself from mind to mind, and from heart to heart, and working out—although it may be in a most mistaken way, and by a process on many accounts most objectionable—something of that nearness of the human to the Divine which is the natural craving of the creature's heart.

Nor has the good been confined to this; for this would only be a Protestant good, the good of one section of Christianity, the good of a minority of professing Christians. Humanising the Deity, making the infinite Spirit take flesh and be born, implied the relation of maternity. And hence that thought—so strange in some views of it, so grand and so beautiful in others—of the mother of God, the pure virgin-mother of God, worshiped throughout the greater part of Christendom—called on, by her gentleness and pity, to secure relief for the distressed, to annihilate the distance between the poor, crawling, oppressed, trembling, down-trodden creature and the mighty Spirit, the omnipotent God, whom that creature feared directly to approach. How much of confidence and trust in danger has been felt — how much by woman in her hour of trial — how much by the fisherman in his little bark tossed by the raging waves — how much by all those classes who have peculiarly looked to her as their patroness and defence, and who, in so doing, have found a sympathy and oneness with the Divine which they could not—at least, in existing circumstances—have realised in any other mode! Truly has this been called by Lady Morgan, in her work on woman, a homage to " the *regina cœli* of countless altars, the *mater dolorosa* of eternal sympathies."

In this process of bringing God down upon the earth in the human shape, an opposite course has been taken from what we find not unfrequently adopted in mythologies —of raising the human to the Divine by apotheosis. But this is only another form of the same tendency—only another operation of the same craving—only another contrivance to bring nearer spirit and matter, heaven and earth, the Divine and the human. Whether it bring down the one or raise the other, still this is the great impulse on which humanity has been working. So, when they had the hero, who in barbarous times delivered men from the inroads of wild beasts, they worshiped him as the demigod Hercules. If diseases were marvellously relieved by the healing art, they found in it the power of the god Æsculapius. The champions who protected them in their lives, remained, as they believed, still their guardians and their protectors, wielding weapons of more celestial temper, and exercising for their defence a more extensive authority. So much did this system spread, that at last it became little better than a shadow or a name. Servility deified even its kings and emperors, and paid them this species of homage. Every where we find a tendency to this mode, as well as to the other, of identifying the Divine and the human. Romulus founds his city—he disappears—he was last seen in a thunder-storm; the author of that long line of glories is gone—dead—no, not dead, but exalted to the seats of the gods. A patrician met him not far from Rome, struck with his beaming aspect, with his heroic form, with all the intimations that the man had grown into the god,—met him as Paul met Christ on the road to Damascus,—and, awe-struck with the celestial personage, received with veneration the promise that still he would watch over the destinies of Rome, and raise the city to enduring grandeur and glory.

Yes, it is ever thus that man seeks nearness to the Divine; and the very progress of the idea of God, the elevation which it is sure to take, the expansiveness which it will assume when it enters into the human mind, by enlarging the distance, seems also proportionally to stimulate this desire. Why, even the Epicureans and Sadducees, whose motto was, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die"—who wished but to live in ease and pleasure—who saw no providential government in the world's concerns—fancied that their gods also loved that ease, and in such quiet enjoyment claimed a species of affinity with them—a sort of nearness to their calm and self-satisfied disposition, at the very least. The mistake of the process appears to me to be this—that certain points have been seized upon for nearness, perhaps from the want or from the neglect of those broader and vaster conceptions which rather lead us to seek nearness to the Infinite in our relations to the innumerable objects and phenomena of nature. No doubt God was manifest in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, and winning sinners to repentance; but God was also manifest in Moses, in Lycurgus, in Numa, legislating for the world, and guiding it a step onwards to the ordinances of social life, and to the erection of the mighty and lasting temple of justice.

As God is in the material world, in every beam of light that darts across the profundities of space, is he not also in every beam of intelligence, of reason, however faint, that raises man above the animal or the mere material creation? Those who have fixed on these distinct points in which to endeavour to approximate to the Divine, see something of omnipotence in the miracle; they see it not where it is far more evident and, rightly considered, far more impressive—in the unfailing operation of the laws of nature, and the returning phenomena of the year which they are sure to bring. The real nearness of God is in his oneness with all things, and the growing tendency in our mind to be at harmony, physically, intellectually, morally, with that system which he has thus originated, to which we belong, and in which we are one with him, and he is one with us. Thus, in material nature, he

> "Warms in the sun, refreshes in the breeze;
> Glows in the stars, and blossoms in the trees;"

and in intellectual and spiritual nature, his purity, his love, show themselves in the efforts of the philanthropist, in acts of piety, in an honest and active sympathy in all that makes man one with his brethren; and thus, loving his brethren as himself, he will best know, unite with, and love his God.

The word "pantheism," applied to speculations such as these, is very often made to bear the aspect of a term of reproach. And yet, why should it? For what is it but one effort, and that not the least promising, for this self-same object which all other forms of religion also aim at and strive incessantly to attain? It is the very history of religion—its universal history—How shall man approach God? And welcome should be any scheme of things, any suggestion or idea, which tends to promote this great, this strong, this universal purpose. The speculation in question does this in many ways. It was in pantheism of the lowest kind—of a kind now comparatively obsolete—that almost all forms of specific religion originated. Their dying gods were suggested by the expiring and self-renewing year, by the setting and the rising sun. Their forms, their deliverers, their virgin mothers, their paradises—these were all connected with the original facts of a common material pantheism, which yet had in itself a refining and self-purifying power. If the one brings us near to God by identifying God with Christ, the other brings us nearer by identifying him with all existence. If the one brings us nearer to God by prodigies and wonders, the other brings us yet nearer by that succession of what would be the most stupendous miracles around us, were they not the effects of every day's and every night's occurrence. If the one brings us nearer by tracing peculiar agency over a limited number of persons, through a limited time, in a limited space, the other brings us yet nearer by that universal spirit, the universal influence which belongs to all ages, to all regions, to all beings. The one brings us nearer to God by a beautiful and sublime chorus—that said to have been sung on one occasion only, to Jewish shepherds, on the birth of a Jewish Messiah—which the other adopts, and hears as the universal, as the everlasting song of all intelligences, all angels, spirits, and enlightened human minds—namely, that chorus of "Glory to God in the highest; on earth peace, and good-will amongst men."

LECTURE IV.

MEDIATION.

September 8th, 1850.

THE doctrine of mediation, although common to many religions, and so prominent in some, is yet not entitled to be classed amongst those religious ideas which, in their simplicity and their universality, are the source and also the test of specific religions. The doctrine of mediation does not arise directly from the religious ideas; but it is a consequence of the imperfection of their development. It is strongest where they are least clearly understood; and its extent is gradually diminished as they are more perfectly apprehended. Mediation supposes two parties, one at least influenced by hostility towards the other. The parties in this case are God and his creatures. Where can we suppose the hostility? Hostility in the creature towards his Creator can be only a phase of the blindest ignorance or the grossest superstition. Hostility in the Creator towards his creatures is incompatible with the fact of such a relation. Still, the notion has prevailed to a large extent; and it is one of those efforts to lessen the remoteness between the human and the Divine which we have already noticed in the lecture on Divine incarnation, but with this difference: the doctrine of Divine incarnation is an endeavour to lessen what we may call the natural remoteness of the Divine from the human; the doctrine of mediation is an endeavour to lessen the moral remoteness of the Divine from the human. The doctrine of incarnation had its suggestion in our different mode of existence from that which we conceive of Divinity; the doctrine of mediation had its suggestion in the different moral condition which we recognise in ourselves, and which we believe the Divinity to enjoy. There has been, therefore, in the whole of these notions the consciousness of sin,—the existence of a moral ideal in the mind, and a conviction of want of conformity with that ideal. There has been an oppressive sense of the difference between unrighteousness and righteousness, transgression and holiness; there has been a labour to account for this, and, when accounted for, to remove it. Hence have arisen theories of fallen angels, acting as tempters and accusers,—of Satan, making evil his good and good his evil, and roaming the earth to entice men into slavery to his will. Hence the fervent, the iterated prayer for mercy,—the longing for an intimation of forgiveness of transgression, and the remission of its penalties. Hence sacrifices and offerings, rising in their worth, animated by the maxim, that "without shedding of blood there is no remission,"—first taking that of the inferior animals, and at last ascending to human sacrifices themselves. Hence the notion of being too vile and base directly to approach the Almighty, and of calling in the aid of mediators and intercessors,—the priest on earth, the saint in heaven. Hence still the craving for something which should yield more satisfaction, and more obviously annihilate this remoteness between the Creator and his creatures. Hence the notion of an incarnate God, for perfect priest and perfect sacrifice,—priest and sacrifice with intercession irresistible, and with atonement complete, sufficing for all ages, and comprehending, as it were, the purchase of pardon for all repentant sinners. What is it all but a craving and striving to diminish the remoteness between man and God morally, as the doctrine of Divine incarnation was thought to diminish the remoteness between man and God naturally?

The course which I take in these lectures is the historical one. The history of religious thought is our subject; and therefore I do not go minutely into the fearful struggles which have helped to originate, to confirm, and to extend this doctrine. If I did, what a scene would open before us! The deep and dark struggles arising from the consciousness of sin, and aggravated by gloomy views of a vindictive Deity, are indeed an awful subject of contemplation. What inward conflicts, shaking the very frame with agony, have they not produced! What grovelling deprecations have they not stimulated! What anguish has been manifested, almost too much for the endurance of human nature! Thus, Job abhors himself, and repents in dust and ashes. Thus, David feels the sense of his atrocious crimes, and looks upon himself as altogether loathsome and unclean. Thus, the Apostle Paul, and millions after him, make the confession of being the chief of sinners. There is something which seems a revelation to the being of utter loathsomeness in himself, and of the avenging fire without and around blazing for his eternal destruction. It is no wonder that, with such sensations, contrivances should have been rife in the world for diminishing these agonies, for shortening this distance from earth to heaven. Hence doctrines of various kinds, preëminently this of mediation; hence notions of sacrifice and of atonement,—sometimes "the fruit of the body for the sin of the soul." Hence rites and ceremonies,—agonising fervency in prayer,—the reiteration of prostrations and of offerings. Nor has the priesthood been slow—any and every priesthood—to avail itself of this feeling, in which indeed its great power has consisted. It has taught the necessity of its own interposition in all the affairs of life, from the cradle to the grave,—made itself necessary for the consecration of the infant and its deliverance from evil spirits,—and made its benediction over the tomb requisite for the salvation of the soul, parted though it be from the unconscious dust that sleeps below. It has devised doctrines of various kinds, all tending to the extension of its own power, as interceding or mediating for the deliverance of mankind. In such ways have priests of all denominations and churches acquired the immense power which they have so often wielded to the world's prejudice and to their own aggrandisement. By such means have they tyrannised over mind and conscience, obstructed the growing light of science, made martyrs of the true, honest, and faithful, and become possessors of so large a portion of the world's treasures. By this have they succeeded so far as to quiet men's minds, and to exhibit as their triumph the complacency even of the very murderer, who, by the power of faith in the doctrines which they preach and the ceremonies they perform, thinks himself about to spring with an exulting leap from the gallows to glory!

Both the worst and the best of men have felt, and by feeling promoted, this sense of immense distance, morally as well as naturally, between man and God, and thus have contributed towards the spread of some doctrine or other of mediation. The worst have felt it. Society forces upon them the sense of their own criminality; brings it home to their minds, places it before their eyes, dins it into their ears; and at length their conscience hears the iterated tale. There cannot be a standard so low but their sense of their own character and doings falls beneath it. There can scarcely be conceived a Deity so mild,—at least, they cannot conceive such a one,—who will not visit with punishment the offences they have committed; and their Deity is not a mild one, not a benignant parent: their own ferocious and grovelling conceptions forbid such a notion to enter into their minds. They array him with their own angry passions; they invest him with their own vindictiveness. Thus have the bad promoted a doctrine of mediation; while the good have done the same, by their higher standard, their purer and loftier moral ideal, to which they could not attain, and by their greater fineness and tenderness of conscience marking in them more sternly and more minutely the matters in which they differed from that moral ideal. The class most free from this species of suffering is the pharisee class, as it has existed in various countries and under various names,—the people whose passions do not lead them astray beyond the bounds which conventionalism has assigned,—who have not originality enough to wander far from the received standard, whilst they have no refined moral perceptions to raise that standard,—who hold alliance with all current opinions,—who keep the peace with all external decencies,—who pass through life with unexceptionable characters,—and whose religion, consisting as it does of form and ceremony, external observances, and artificial appliances and arrangements, disposes them towards a doctrine of mediation, of which their own consciences would not have felt the necessity, because those consciences have neither light enough nor strength enough to inflict on them the terrors of which worse men and better men are both doomed to the endurance. Therefore they too have aided, in their way, to sustain and to extend this notion of the necessity of some intervention between man and his heavenly Father,—some interposition to purchase his favour,—some medium of communication, without which our spirits cannot hold converse with the Author of spirits.

The doctrine of mediation is now put forward as a prominent doctrine of Christianity. But Christ, in the parable of the prodigal son, has set an obvious and everlasting stamp of reprobation upon all these theories, upon all these results of the imperfect development of the religious ideas in the mind and soul of man. That parable is decisive as to the light which had beamed upon his mind, as to the views which he entertained of the relative positions of the creature and the Creator. In that lovely narrative there is no priestly intervention, there is no sacrifice, no propitiation, no atonement, no mediation; there is nothing between the parent and the child. And what is the description of the prodigal's repentance? Not that he was converted, regenerated, preternaturally changed; but that he "came to himself;" he returned simply to the original dictates of his own unsophisticated nature. This is the doctrine of the parable,—a doctrine adopted by common sense and by the poet: "who is not satisfied with repentance, is not of heaven nor earth." But, though adopted by common sense and by the poet, it is not prevalent in systems of theology. For this simple doctrine, this impulse, as it were, given by the narrative to the effort at immediate communication between the finite and the Infinite,—the human and the Divine,—the ignorant and erring, but loving, and the Omniscient, but loving also,—this is not Catholicism, nor Protestantism,—it is not Church-of-Englandism, nor Dissent. Its doctrine, put in plain terms, would be condemned of all; and in turn it condemns them. It arraigns them of vain imaginations, of artificial interposition between those things which cannot be so severed as to stop the communion between them. It shows us human nature, in coming to itself, thereby coming to its God, finding him every where, and every where gracious and loving,—holding communion with him through the universality of being, or through the genuine dictates of our minds and hearts, and thus resting in peace, and in faith aspiring.

Moral sanctions are natural consequences. The doctrine of mediation is founded on the theory of an arbitrary addition,—of punishment inflicted by some Divine power which does not act in the ordinary course of cause and effect, and of universal law. It supposes interference for the arbitrary punishment, and then calls for the arbitrary mediation. The Jewish theocracy attempted to uphold this; but it would not do. The most dutiful child did not always have long life, in recompense of honouring his parents, though such was promised in the commandment. The wicked throve in the land, though it was promised to the meek and the righteous; they added house to house, and land to land, and aggrandised themselves, and oppressed their brethren. However sedulously the priests might teach this distribution, the facts were too glaring; scepticism arose, as we find in the writings of Solomon and in the controversy in the book of Job. To scepticism succeeded an attempt at a very different solution of the problem,—that which referred the rectification of the inequalities of human life to a life to come. Still the world was not satisfied. The notion of arbitrary infliction, so essential to that of mediation, was only upheld by priestly influence. It was upheld, however,—it did exist,—and it exists at this day in Hindostan, where, Rammohun Roy tells us, there are sects who believe that their actions meet immediately with reward or punishment, by the direct interposition of their deities. And why should we go to Hindostan? Does it not exist in this country? Do we not hear of establishments raised, of houses built, with funds that have been granted in answer to prayer, without the employment of any other means? Do we not hear of Divine judgments arbitrarily inflicted for technical offences, as they must be at the most, if they be offences at all? Have we not been told that the conduct of the managers of the Post Office involved a probability of the return of cholera to our shores as a Divine judgment and visitation? And yet, with the reversal of the arrangements that for a time have been forced upon the country, and with the adoption of sanitary legislation and sanitary measures, common sense believes that we shall be in a better position to resist the invasion of the fearful epidemic, and thus to reduce those who hold this theory, and put it forth as the essence of religion, to the very forlorn conviction that the judgments of Providence may be baffled by the establishment of a Board of Health.

Some of the worst perversions and the grossest abuses have arisen from the carrying out of these theories of arbitrary interposition, and the necessity of interference, of intervention, of mediation. And yet, what has been the effect of the progress of knowledge, but to narrow the field which mediation once possessed? No commander now, however devout,—however confident that he was leading forth his troops to battle for the throne and for the altar, to fight in the cause of religion,—would command the sun and the moon to stand still to prolong the day's slaughter, and hope to be heard in heaven, and to see the result. We have worn that feeling out in many things; we have got a sense of the prevalence of law in the material world. It is now generally admitted in physics. In mental operations, although not so entirely, yet to a considerable extent it is admitted there also; and our progress is towards the conviction that in all things there is law,—harmonising law,—in the spiritual as well as in the corporeal; and that this law—wise, good, just, beneficent, and paternal—is of more value to the heart, as a source of strength and consolation, than all the theories of intervention, of priesthood, or of mediation.

In fact, with this conviction growing, and with this sense of the oneness of God and of his works,—his universal spirit,—what need can there be for any one to interpose? To what effect can there be interposition? We do not see more of beauty in the flower because the botanist instructs us in its conformation. The heavens declared the glory of God, and the firmament showed forth his handiwork, before men had much knowledge of astronomy. The increase of knowledge adds association, indeed; but it only adds association. The feeling, and the impulse, and the sense of present Divinity, were there at the first, and are there still; and that is what we should regard. If science, if knowledge, can add but comparatively little, what is it that the priest can add? Can he give greater brightness to the star, or greater fragrance to the flower? Can he make more of God in them than there exists already to the perceiving eye and the feeling heart? Let him stand by, then, and not impede the progress of man towards his God,—his return, in so far as he has wandered,—his effort to be at one with him, by being at one with all that is wise and gracious and lovely in his works,—thus holding that direct intercourse which makes us one with him as he is one with all things.

LECTURE V.

COMPARISON OF THE HISTORY OF RELIGIOUS THOUGHT WITH THAT OF SCIENCE.

September 15*th*, 1850.

READING history is not a jot more useful than reading romances—if, indeed, it be so useful—when it is done in the same way, without any active exercise of the faculties, with the mere recipiency of a story, with a passive yielding up of the mind to the author. Reading history is not an idle occupation; it is one in which a great variety of powers and faculties may be called into lively and constant activity. Napoleon said of history, that it was a fiction which the world had agreed to believe: it might be so half a century ago, it is not so now. In that period historical criticism has arisen and made rapid advances, and has created new duties, and arduous ones, both for the writer and for the reader of history. History is not a conventionalism; so far as it is valuable, it is a reality; and our business in reading it is to get at the reality of past things. To do this with the greatest accuracy, and to the largest extent which our powers and our circumstances will allow, history should be read with a frequent inquiry after the inherent credibility of the things narrated. There are many stories before the world, which, looked at with a scrutinising eye, condemn themselves without the need of further evidence. They are self-convicted, if we bring to them our knowledge of human nature and of the ordinary course of cause and effect established in the universe. We should read history with reference to evidence; we should inquire what proof there is beyond assertion, should look out for those monumental records which are so often more faithful, more authentic, than the most laboured or polished periods of the historical writer. We should look for the bearing of those great laws which apply to mind as well as matter, and which influence the events of the world's history, as well as the succession of day and night, and the course of the seasons. We should seek after and allow for the bias of the historian whom we are reading, the colouring influence present in his own mind; and not that only, but the influence under which his authorities may have made their statements, or deduced what were to them, as well as to him, only inferences. It is by the exercise of such powers as these that the knowledge of the past has, in recent times, advanced so rapidly that it is said, with truth and justice, that we know more of ancient Rome than did the Romans themselves,—even those accomplished men amongst them who professed to give to the world the annals of their country.

And if we know more of Rome than Romans did, why may we not know more of Moses than Jews did? The one is as practicable as the other; the knowledge is as attainable in the one case as it is in the other; it depends on the application of the same principles of criticism; they may be applied with equal care and impartiality; and they may produce results equally assured to our minds, and equally useful and important. We may not only know more of Moses than the Mosaic people did, but more of creation than Moses did, notwithstanding the account which bears his name. For geologists have read the monuments of creation, have deciphered the hieroglyphics of nature, and have brought demonstrative proof of operations, influences, long series of events, of which in the Mosaic account there is no trace whatever. And this remark applies to many other things; the fact being, that a history of religion—I should rather say, what professes to be religious history—is not yet read in the same way as other histories, subjected to the same tests, regarded with the same activity of the mental faculties; but that, while abandoning so unreasonable a course in other annals, we still, when they assume a sacred character, go back to the old practice of reading history as we read romance, in a passive condition: though with this difference perhaps, that in the one case we meet it with the acknowledgment that it is all fiction; in the other case, we meet it with the assumption that it is all infallible verity. Hence, if an extraordinary character, an utterly incredible event, be found in the record, the reader merely says it was preternatural. If there be some obscure description of wars of nations which have never yet been fought, and victories never yet won, he says: "Oh, that is a prophecy." If there be described actions of cruelty, of bloodshed, of oppression, and massacre, he quiets his moral sense with the assumption that it was done under Divine direction. If there be a precept inapplicable to modern circumstances, and the attempt to act upon which could only produce wrongs, suffering, confusion, still there must be a meaning put upon it consistent with our modern views; and then that is thrown back upon, and assumed to be, the view with which it was originally given. And if there be something so astounding—to use Lord Bacon's often-quoted phrase—"that reason stands aghast, and faith herself is half confounded," still the reconciliation is at hand,—"It is the Lord's doing, and wonderful in our eyes." Read in this way, sacred history can be no more profitable than the most profane history that ever was produced.

And what is the history of religious thought? It is very like the history of any other kind of thought. It has its natural history as well as any science. Let us take a single science for a specimen,—say astronomy. We may trace several successive periods through which it has gone; periods naturally succeeding each other, and having a definite result. They have so succeeded, and they have such result, because they come under the category of subjection to law; the laws of mind, the laws which influence the course of things in nature,—these have had their effect. The first period of astronomy was one of simple sensuous observation,—mere perception. Man beheld the sun in its brightness, the paler moon, the glittering stars; and he was satisfied with seeing that they were lights, and lights which measured out his days, months, years. He thought no more of them; he looked no further; his astronomy was the same as that of one of the Roman-Catholic prelates of Ireland, recently sitting in the Synod of Thurles, who, while he condemns the "godless colleges," has put forth his undoubting faith that the sun is a light in heaven about six feet wide, within an inch or so, and that this great firmament of the stars is as the inner surface of a huge globe, all wheeled round and round this central earth,—the great object of Divine care and providence. Such is held as the unchanging faith of a prelate in an infallible Church; such, no doubt, was the world's earliest astronomy. It was what they saw, and neither more nor less; and that has had its influence upon language ever since. The sun will rise and set, in common language, as long as the earth revolves on its axis.

The second period in the history of man's knowledge of the heavenly bodies was that of myth and legend. He began to personify them. He ascribed to them the consciousness which he felt in himself. He assumed volition in the giver of light and warmth and harvests. The stars had something mystical to him; their radiance was so pure; their motions—obvious to the untaught observer—were so intricate, yet so harmonious, that he beheld there "the watchers and the holy ones," to whose guardianship and guidance he was willing to trust his own fortunes. Or, he saw the sun as a car or chariot, driven by some presiding angel or deity, who directed its course along the heavens, until at length he saw it received into the bosom of the ocean. These and other kinds of mythical attempts to account for phenomena multiplied upon the world in that age of history. And for a time men were content thus to look at the heavens; and if some of them, with greater knowledge, described a progress of the sun through the signs of the zodiac, it was under the figure of a mighty conqueror, carrying his arms around the world, and every where making donations, bounties, to those whom he subdued, teaching them arts, and leading them onward in the course of social improvement. Facts, however, relating to the starry heavens disclosed themselves, especially in climates where they shone with a brilliancy unknown to other regions, where they could be observed more continuously, as well as admired more fervently. And at length came the period which we may call that of inspiration of the truth,—the time when better conceptions burst upon more intelligent minds,—when the grand idea of the solar system was caught, elaborated, and expressed, as by the mighty intellect of Pythagoras. Doomed though the conception might be to long ages of obscuration, still there was the plain, simple, elemental truth of the solar system, derived, as it were, by sudden impression on the mind, proclaimed to the world, and standing out in bold relief from the gross errors by which it was surrounded. It was light shining in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not.

Then came the fourth period,—a period of mental exercise upon apparent facts,—a period of systematising, but of systematising from insufficient data,—when there was not the genius to apply the principle that had actually been detected, but when there was the industry to reason upon what was assumed or taken for granted. Then arose the Ptolemaic system, in its complexity; then were the heavens with

> "Cycle and epicycle scribbled o'er;"

then were theories advanced, fluttering on the surface of thought for a while, afterwards to be engulfed, the last of which was traced perhaps in the vortices of Descartes. Tycho Brahe was the last of this species of theorisers. Ptolemy had made every thing revolve round the earth; he made the planets, with their satellites, revolve round the sun; and the sun itself, with all its attendant train, around the earth. In fact, astronomy became as complicated as the Athanasian Creed. But the accumulation of facts went on; the true theory of the world was revived,—revived, if we may believe the story of the falling apple, as much by an impulse or impression on the mind of Newton, as it probably was at the outset on that of Pythagoras, or, in the intermediate period, on that of Copernicus. But, fenced with accumulated facts, surrounded with proofs, clearer conceptions of the order of the universe arose upon the minds of men. These have been simplified; our very school-books teach them to the mere child; there has been diffusion; and though it was very prematurely said that astronomy was the first of all the sciences to attain absolute completeness, for it has not done that yet, principles are to a certain extent established; and facts of a great variety, some of them of surprising novelty, have become known. The growth of other sciences helped astronomy onwards; the arts, the invention of instruments—especially of the telescope—helped it onwards; the general cultivation of the human intellect helped it onwards; and now it has attained, not a complete state of perfection—

far from it—but a state in which it impresses the mind with an idea of the vastness—we may say, of the infinity—of the discoveries yet to be made, of new views to be obtained, and of a grandeur which surpasses all the conceptions of the most enlightened philosophers of ancient times,—of a subject which may still call forth man's greatest powers, and command his profoundest reverence.

Such has been the history of astronomy and astronomical thought. The history of religious thought shows us precisely the same periods, in the same order of succession. They bear the identical characteristics. Did astronomy begin in simple sensuousness,—in merely perceiving that which presents itself to our bodily organs? What was the first stage of religion? It was that when

> "The untutored mind
> Sees God in clouds, or hears him in the wind."

It is that in which man identifies Divinity with the greatest or most powerful object that presents itself to his sensations; that in which he listens reverently to the thunder, as the voice of God, or the trump of his archangel. Was the second period in the history of astronomy that of a mythical and legendary age?—so is that of religion. As soon as man left off worshiping the sun in his brightness, he began to indulge in the inventions or suggestions of mythology. He saw enshrined deities in visible objects; he accounted for every thing by a supposed Divine interposition. Did the rainbow glow in the cloud?—it was the hand of God that had fixed it there, the sign of a covenant with the world that heat and cold, summer and winter, seed-time and harvest, should not cease. Was there the ruin of a lofty tower, its builders and its purpose unknown?—men had piled up that mass that they might scale the very heavens, and God had dispersed them in his contempt and indignation. Thus, every appearance, every observance, became the foundation in religious thought for a mythical narrative. The seventh day, observed by so many people of different religions and different countries—the day when man ceases from his work—must have been the day on which God ceased from his labour. What labour? The Divine toil of creating heaven and earth.

And so we find the earlier records of all religions full of this mystical and legendary character; denoting the second stage of the history of religious thought corresponding to that of astronomical thought.

The third era was that of a sudden glimpse of the truth,—in astronomy, the motion of the world. And has not religion had this as well as astronomy? If—in an ignorant age, with accumulated facts and observations—the piercing mind of Pythagoras detected the real character of the solar system, so have such minds as that of Moses, in a similarly barbarous age, and amid ignorance and prejudice as gross as any which ever obscured the aspect of the starry heavens, seen something of the Divine unity, infinity, and majesty; and taught that truth which so often shines out upon us startlingly from amidst the grossest systems of mythology and of idolatry.

Then in religion came the fourth corresponding period; that of perverted, yet actively exercised, intellect and speculations; which, if they made astronomy complex, what have they not done for theology,—accumulating there the results of all that the acutest intellect could do without sufficient data, and with materials grouped together on an erroneous principle? All religions have had their seasons of complication,—of multiplied credence, carried out into most minute particulars,—of mysteries approaching to contradictions, and sometimes making more than an approach to contradiction. But in religion, as in astronomy, the accumulation of facts has gone on; the dictates of the moral sense have been observed more narrowly; the agency of law throughout universal being has been observed and traced more widely. Men have gradually had clearer conceptions, which came into such direct collision with some of these speculations, that scepticism inevitably arose, and out of scepticism more distinct notions of truth and reality. As progress in other sciences helped astronomy, as inventions of every kind helped astronomy, as the more general cultivation of intelligence helped astronomy,—so have they all helped on theology; and, like astronomers, geologists and historians have carried light into what were the dark places of implicit faith; they have exploded errors; they have proclaimed truths which the world will not forget, and which will not lose their hold upon the mind until they have effectually quelled the influence of the errors to which they are opposed. Here, too, have been the same succession and diffusion, with a much more general knowledge and comprehension of the truth; and the final result is the same,—that of believing theology not to be a science completed eighteen hundred years ago, and bound up for ever between the covers of a book,—not of believing that, three centuries ago, the interpretation of that book was definitely fixed for all coming ages, — but that in theology, as in astronomy, we are left with a sense of how much there is yet unexplored, an infinity, calling for our highest powers and our most intense devotion to the search.

In this parallelism, then, I think, we have a strong indication of the fact, that religion is a natural product rather than a preternatural interference. The course it has taken in the world runs so parallel with that which I have exemplified in one science, and which might have been exemplified in many other sciences, that we can scarcely avoid the impression that in the one instance, as in the other, we are tracing a natural history. For we have an origin, a progress, a growth, a development, similar in both cases; they bear the marks of affinity,—affinity with the laws of our own being,—affinity with the phenomena and circumstances by which we are surrounded. The inference is in favour of religion being something natural to man, springing up from within,—and not something forced upon him, driven into him, as it were, from without. No doubt there are differences in their history, —very remarkable differences. Although with the same outline, the progress of astronomy has been more clear and orderly than that of theology. Even though truth might be proclaimed to the world before the time was come when it could be generally received, yet we find it struggling for reception; we find something like continuity in the march of science, much more of it than we trace in the history of religion. How is this? Why is this? Why, that in astronomy, passion and prejudice do not interfere as they do in religion. The observation and classification of facts—which at the first, perhaps, seem to have little or no influence on man's interests, whatever they may prove to have afterwards—is performed in a calmer state of mind, with less bias; prejudice is weaker in the man of science than in the man who believes that he has certain discoveries of the invisible world; and who is not only more tenacious of his opinion, but who has the impulse too often to force that opinion upon the mind, or, what with him is the same thing, on the outward acceptance, of others. Temporal interests have not been bound up with astronomy, as they have been bound up with what was called religion. Science has had its martyrs, indeed, but it has made no martyrs; they have been the victims of conflicting religions, jealous of its progress and fearful of its discoveries. There has been no astronomical priesthood; and perhaps that contains, more than any other fact, the solution of the difference between the history of astronomy and that of religion. There has been no class of men plundering their fellow-creatures in the name of astronomy,—holding exclusive possession of splendid institutions and of large properties by the orthodoxy of their astronomy,—calling for the subjection of all other classes, whether of the thinking or of the active portion of mankind, because all were bound to be subservient to the will and to the oracles of the gifted astronomical priesthood. There has been nothing in astronomy of that curse of the ancient world and of the modern world which bows the human mind to the yoke of the most abject superstition, and opposes the most formidable front to the progress of truth and of reality. To this mainly may the difference be ascribed. There is enough of similitude to make us rejoice that the progress of religion, though impeded and thwarted, and though stained by many errors and crimes, yet has held on its course,—has held on its course worthily and triumphantly,—in spite of all.

Religion, like astronomy, first was in heaven,—shone in the stars, was harmonious in their order; and in them the sons of God shouted for joy. Religion, like astronomy, descended from heaven to earth, in the benignant influences of the celestial bodies; and on earth it springs up again,—this globe, faithful and fruitful, maintaining its own place in the solar system, rolling on in its course, and bearing its varied and its magnificent products. Religion, like astronomy, found its way from the outer to the inner world; its production was a natural growth in man's mind and heart, with the first up-wakening of his intellect, and his gazing around him, and realising all the grand and lovely which he saw there: he identified it with that spiritual life which he shares in common with universal being, and which he worships in its infinity, its purity, and its omnipotence. Together they have grown, although it may be oftentimes with unequal pace. It is their nature, if let alone by the interests, the arts, and the passions of men, to grow together yet more harmoniously; and in the expansion of each of them, light is shed upon the other.

Religion and all sciences, if thus let alone, have their affinities, their mutual action and reaction; so that the one cannot thrive whilst the other is in a state of deterioration. Religion is God's work as well as astronomy, —his work on the heart, as astronomy is upon the intellect, and as the perception of the material universe is upon the physical sense of mankind.

It has been by that suggestive principle which is spread over all nature, that man has attained alike either to science or to religion. By the affinity within him he has been impelled to look around him, to seek to know more and more, and to worship a God not existing apart from nature, not unknown to science, but identified with nature, the knowledge of whom is science to mortal minds. And thus let alone, how rapid would be the tendency of religion to advance as well as of science! How have men striven to advance it under all the difficulties which they have encountered; with all the misjudgings, all the interferences, all the incumbering traditions,—how have they still, from age to age, contributed something towards this work, — as every observer, from his watch-tower, noting down the nightly appearances of the stars, has contributed something, according to his means, towards the progress of astronomical science! Mankind have worked at religious truth, gaining much, considering the difficulties, and prepared to gain far more, could hostile and conflicting influences — those of selfishness and of power—be withdrawn from the arena. They have striven from age to age, under the influence of Divinity itself. Piling up their accumulating knowledge, exercising their devout and their beneficent feelings, they have striven to rear those pillars of justice, truth, mercy, and hope,—the supports on which rests the temple of God, where man best worships him with a voice in harmony with that of all nature.

LECTURE VI.

HISTORY OF RELIGIOUS THOUGHT (*concluded*).

September 22*d*, 1850.

THE history of thought can only be written by Omniscience. The subject is too vast for our minds. We cannot grasp sufficient of its course to trace it as we would. We have but fragmentary portions. Its infinite diversity baffles us —the variety of its phases in different minds, varying from apparently one degree above the brutes, almost to the boundaries of the intelligence of superior beings. And yet, with all this imperfection and this multitudinousness, we may trace some analogy between the history of human thought and the progress of an individual mind. We may, so to speak, individualise the intellectual course of human nature,—see it striving after knowledge,—loaded with difficulties,—plunging into error,—struggling on,—now misled in one direction, now in another,—now obtaining one phase of new light, and now a different view of things,—and still exemplifying the great law of progress, the law which regulates, not only the individual, but the mass of social thought, the entirety of human intelligence. The history of thought is indeed the most important of all histories. Physical history is its substratum; political history is the description of its symptomatic manifestations—the twitchings and convulsions of the limbs, not the working of the brain within; scientific history is but one department of human thought; and religious thought,—to which the course of lectures that I conclude this morning has specifically related,—though also a department, yet claims to be the highest of all, and to exercise its influence over all the rest. I assume something of a notion of this progress, this history of thought; but it is unwritten,—unwritten even as to any nation or race of mankind,—unwritten even, except very imperfectly and in rare cases, as to any individual intelligence. Religious thought, the most important of all, with its vast unwritten history,—how much more does it involve than all other histories! For what has it not done? Of what stupendous changes in the world has it not been the impulse and the motive-power? By religious thought we sometimes see a nation created, as the Jews in the wilderness,—framed, organised, moulded, coloured by religious thought in all their institutions. We see nations destroyed, as well as created, by religious thought, as in the case of those same Jews, battling desperately against the military power that overcame the world, and, as to their institutions and social being, perishing from the country they had so long inhabited. Religious thought originates and destroys dynasties; it raised Constantine to the imperial throne, and it terminated the course of his imperial successors. What personal heroism has it not developed, as in Athanasius, or those old monks of Egypt,—bearding emperors on their thrones and surrounded by their guards! What enthusiasm has it not excited, manifesting itself in deeds, not merely of individual, but of social and national heroism; sometimes driving back a powerful invader, as in the case of Joan of Arc,—sometimes subduing mighty and extended nations, as in the case of Mahomet. Religious thought has mixed itself up with all the developments of character, and the passions that have marked the vicissitudes, the strange vicissitudes, of the annals of nations from the beginning of human society.

And what lessons may we not learn, even from those glimpses which we possess of the history of religious thought —what important social lessons! With a voice never inaudible, it teaches rulers the limits of their power; it says: "Thus far shalt thou come, but no farther." It shows them, from time to time, in different countries, what they cannot accomplish, in all their plenitude of authority, and with all their diversity of agency. Kings and rulers have professed themselves champions of this or that mode of faith. Have they upheld it in the world when once the tide of thought had set in an opposite direction? With all their persecutions, with their attempts at extermination, with their *autos-da-fé*, with their bribery often, and corrupting influences,—what one heresy has political power ever banished from the earth, ever annihilated, and so overwhelmed that it did not rise again and show itself, when the appropriate minds and tendencies existed, vigorous as in the ancient days when first it flourished?

Other lessons are to be learned—lessons illustrative of the general character of history connected with religion. How distinctly, for instance, does the Bible history delineate, foreshadow to us, as it were, the future progress of human thought in relation to the preternatural! There are in the Bible three great miraculous periods: that of Moses, and Jewish emancipation; that of Elijah and Elisha, and Israelitish reformation; and the time of Christ. Now, what is the distinctive character of the miracles of each of these periods? They are more stupendous, the farther back we go; they gradually subside towards an affinity with the natural course and order of things. Moses extends his rod, and the waters of an ocean part in order to protect the Israelites, afterwards to reunite and destroy the Egyptians. Elijah only smites the Jordan with his mantle, and parts the waters of a little river. Moses brings plagues upon a nation, judgments on an entire people; he overwhelms their great ones and their inferior classes; signs from heaven, fire and blood,—these mark and make the splendour of his punitive miracles. Elisha calls two bears from the wilderness, which destroy forty children. With the later prophets, one ascends to heaven: in the previous time, thousands of the associates of Dathan and Abiram had descended into hades. The modification is most distinct; the preternatural character is lowered. In the miracles of Christ and his apostles, it is lowered again. There is no chariot of fire, like that of Elijah, for the ascension of Christ; his ascension and his transfiguration are both assigned merely to the top of a mountain. He does not call fire from heaven, as did Elijah, to consume the priests of Baal; but he feeds a multitude with loaves and fishes. In the record of the apostles, the miraculous character becomes yet more faint and more assimilated to the ordinary course of human events. And if we look only at the New Testament, we find that the Gospels are comparatively full of miracles; in the Acts they occur more sparingly—the natural predominates over the preternatural; and in the most authentic works of all, those which with the greatest certainty we can ascribe to the author to whom they are generally attributed,—the epistles of Paul,—we find no allusion to the miracles of Christ, and only infrequent and indistinct ones to the miraculous power at all as existing in the Christian Church. Now, what is this gradual subsiding of the record, this continuous change in the same direction, but a type of the progress of human thought in relation to the preternatural?

Another question which may well exercise the mind in striving to gain some notion, or to comment upon what is known, of the history of human thought, is this: Whether Christianity was not likely to exist, even if he after whom it is called had not existed, or had manifested a different character? Dogmatical Christianity, as we have it, is not the work of Christ, but of Paul; and whose work soever it was, the speculations which are combined into one system in it had their previous existence. Before Christianity, there was the notion of man as in a fallen condition, waiting for and wanting a redeemer. Before Christianity, there were the speculations which Paul formed into shape,—of the connection of the whole human race,—of their dying by one covenant and reviving by another. Before the Evangelist John wrote his Gospel, there were the speculations of the divine λογος, or word,—of the divine thought, as separable from Divinity itself,—as emanating or going forth, and becoming the agent of creation and of redemption. And so, through a variety of other points, we might trace preëxisting speculations, requiring but some power, some person, some combination of circumstances, to harmonise them. They already existed in contiguity in the Jewish land; and they might have been harmonised perhaps by a warlike as by a peaceful Messiah, by a conquering as by a suffering Messiah. In fact, the success of Mahomet in a later age shows what we might imagine of a Jewish secular and military Messiah, fulfilling more closely to the letter than the actual facts many of the predictions in the Old Testament of the conquest which was to be achieved by the children of Israel, and of the predominance of Jehovah which was to be asserted over all the earth.

I can only indicate a very few of the lessons, the inferences, the questions, which may associate themselves with this inquiry; and I shall only now remark on the different obstacles which have prevented that regular process of thought in religion which, in the last lecture, I endeavoured to trace, in outline at least, as to the progress of science exemplified in astronomy. The progress of religious thought has been prevented by the tendency to dwell on externals as constituting religion. The abundant pantomime of savage nations early associated action rather than words, and words rather than thoughts, with religious exercises. The inner impulse and feeling were forgotten in the outward manifestation. The interpretation of oracles became an art; and with the Roman augurs, this complicated art only attained something like its maturity when the belief had worn out from the minds of the great bulk of the people. The Reformation checked the progress of ceremony in the Catholic Church for a while, as Christianity had checked the progress of ceremony in the Jewish Church. In both cases, however, ceremony revived, merely varying the forms in which it was displayed. There is a tendency in ceremony to grow and multiply—a tendency of the external to encroach upon the internal. We find this in Protestant churches; we find it in Dissenting churches; for even there, with all their simplicity, how much do the mere unintelligent reading of the Scriptures, and the attendance on a certain number of prayers and ceremonies, supersede the real, inward, mental working by which man should obtain some mastery over the intellectual portion of his religion! How little, indeed, is done of this in any case! We might number the spare hours, we might almost count up the minutes, which are all that many give to thought upon religion. How many lives there are in which these hours would be comparatively, not only not numerous, but thrown into absolute insignificance, when contrasted with the degree of intellectual vigour which is exercised upon some commercial speculations! Most are but too ready to accept a substitute for thought. Some find it in their Bibles; some in interpretations of those Bibles; and the great majority wait for suggestion, for delineation, for enforcement. They are calm expectants of something that is to be put before them, to be illustrated and proved; and with an indolent judgment upon that, they reckon themselves thinkers upon religious topics. More than this is due to the subject. It is only by intelligence that infinite intelligence can be rightly contemplated.

Another obstruction that has been raised to the course of religious thought has been the attempts at arbitrary fixedness which have been made, especially by ecclesiastical authorities, from time to time. The notion has extensively prevailed that in the past we are to find somewhere a perfect religion as to doctrines; and, assuming such a perfection to exist in the past, the most strenuous efforts have been directed towards perpetuating that which was thought its true interpretation. Hence mitred men have gathered themselves together; they have made their selection of ancient dogmas; they have called this true doctrine, and that superstition; and they have endeavoured to compress within their ecclesiastical books the sum and substance—or, as they vainly dreamed, the root and life—of that which constitutes religious thought. Why, the birth of every child into the world, the kindling up of every new intelligence, is a rebuke to such presumption. Mind has its rights, even in the lowliest; freedom of thought is one of those rights; and the plans of Providence have connected it with all purity and all worth in religious thought. It will not be thus stayed or arrested by synods, or conclaves, or professed reformations; it grows as the human intellect grows, enlarges as it enlarges, and ascends as it aspires; and it is this reverence for the individual which creed-makers, obliterating it from their minds, have contravened in their efforts, striving to fetter that whose very nature is to advance. The wretched results as to knowledge and science, and as to the useful arts springing out of knowledge and science, of such an attempt are too evident to need illustration. They are not less absurd in religion, and they are still more pernicious. The very prophets and apostles, who are appealed to in behalf of this fixity, from whom the supposed means of realising the truth are derived, advanced upon one another; they superseded one another. The views of such men in one age eclipsed those who had preceded them in a less enlightened age; and they picture to us what should be the world's history in religious thought, while such thought exists and the world continues.

Another great difficulty has been the separation of profession from inward and real thought. How soon this commenced in religion! How dreary have been its results! I speak not now of conscious hypocrisy, but of that bias of the mind which arises from holding creeds and articles, and then making them into guides. Many of the most distinguished theologians have exhibited to us the forlorn spectacle of honest men converted into partisans. They have been like advocates, hunting for evidence of a foregone conclusion; they have sought out facts or arguments to support that which they were already determined to support; and thus their minds have wandered far from that state in which alone knowledge and truth are to be attained by the individual. And how much there has been even of direct hypocrisy, notoriously, in the history of churches! How much of the influence of that connection with temporal concerns by which religion has been polluted, by which it has been made an affair of pounds, shillings, and pence, of broad lands and rich livings, rather than a matter of honest thought, and of pure, unbiassed feeling! What can we say to thousands of intelligent men condemned, as the condition of their teaching their fellow-creatures, to bind themselves by the solemn obligation of an oath never to grow wiser, never to think in any other way, on a multitude of topics, each of which has been a source of dissension and controversy since such questions were first mooted? What can be the result of all this but to overlay religious thought, to pervert its nature, and to stop its progress? And yet it has shown its conformity to that law, in spite of all difficulties. They have merely delayed its course, and perhaps, by that very delay, have rendered more careful and more sure the steps by which the mind of man has advanced in the knowledge of his Creator.

The perfection and beneficence of Deity and universal providence,—the hope of human immortality,—these have never been obliterated from the mind of man by specific systems, nor have they ever rested upon those systems. These are the early, the natural, the continuous thought of humanity in reference to religion. They owed nothing to creeds and articles; they have not been supported by such formulæ; they have very often indeed been forgotten, the controversies of the day assuming a broader space in the minds of ecclesiastical combatants than these pure, elementary principles of all that is intellectual in religion. They have sustained themselves under an infinite variety of specific forms of doctrine and of worship. They have a more legitimate claim than any other thoughts of man to universality and perpetuity. They resemble the great object to which they relate; they anticipate the interminable endurance of which they cherish the anticipation in our souls. Here, then, let us see the essentials of religious thought, its primary elements, its pervading spirit. These truths and hopes arise upon us like stars; by them we may safely steer our course; they are above the clouds and storms of earthly passions and of ecclesiastical collisions; their brightness is inextinguishable, and they are ever above the horizon.

ON THE TRUE LIFE OF CHRIST, AND ITS MORAL SIGNIFICANCE.

LECTURE I.

INTRODUCTORY: ON THE NATURAL AND THE PRETERNATURAL.

October 27th, 1850.

THE few remarks which I shall make this morning on the natural and the preternatural are introductory to the subject of which notice was given a considerable time ago as that with which the present course of lectures would be occupied—namely, the true life of Christ, and its moral significance. By the true life of Christ, I do not mean the exact ascertainment, were that indeed possible, of its externalities. I shall not in these lectures enter upon those elaborate and minute questions of criticism with which such works as that of Strauss are occupied. Such arguments, indeed, are scarcely fit for the purpose of popular address to a mixed and fluctuating auditory; they require a closer attention than can be reasonably expected to discourses delivered here; they require more of detailed investigation than is here practicable; their examination is a personal study, however available the results may be made for such purposes as are here contemplated. But, independent of investigations of this kind, there is an interesting course of inquiry which may be instituted into what is much more material than the verification or the disproof of this or that particular circumstance in the narrative; and that is, what is the moral scope, the spiritual coherence, the life and purpose, of that around which narratives, founded or unfounded, have gathered, and which has become the subject of various traditions and legends. And it is this to which I would direct your attention.

Whatever the havoc which may have been made by criticism in the evangelical narratives,—however much that has been taken as proved by direct evidence may be unable to stand the severer test of a closer application of the principles of historical analysis,—still, it is allowed on all hands that many of the sayings attributed to Christ bear such internal evidence of their authenticity as may make us receive them with unhesitating confidence as his sayings. To these, then, and to the natural events of his life, I look, in order to find materials there for answering the question, "What manner of man was this?" And there can be little doubt, whatever they may leave in obscurity and uncertainty, that for this purpose they will yield us adequate materials. Give to such a palæontologist as Cuvier a bone, which tells nothing to the uninformed eye,—let it be one we deem the most unimportant and insignificant,—and from it he will rebuild the mighty skeleton of some creature that has lived ages and ages before man was upon the earth; he will not only rebuild the skeleton, but he will clothe it again, will picture its form to our eyes, and will prove that such was the reality; and from its structure he will proceed to demonstrate its habits, its food, its mode of existence. If this can be done with a small bone of the skeleton preserved in a fossil state, what may not be done with words, which are spirit and life,—what may not be deciphered in the very heart of a moral teacher yet palpitating in our sight,—in indications which, as they come direct from the inward impulses of his soul, reveal to us the nature of that soul, its very life, its dearest and most cherished purposes?

To this source of evidence, then, I shall apply. There is the preternatural in the history of Christ, but, in the usual circumstances of preternatural history, with evidence not of the strongest at first, and inevitably growing weaker in each successive generation, with inherent difficulties, as well as with ample ground for external doubts. There it is; but it is not our surest guidance. And what is this preternatural, which to some seems all in all in matters of religion? What is its position in relation to the natural? Originally they were one; the present distinction was utterly unknown. To the child or to the savage, there is no such difference; all is natural, or, if you will, all is preternatural. There is a misty notion of an overruling power, and phenomena which to us are the known results of known laws seem at the commencement of human observation as arbitrary acts. To humanity in its infant state, the earth does not revolve, the sun does not rise; but Apollo drives his fiery car through the sky to rest in the ocean, or Osiris pursues his triumphant course through the zodiac. The lightning strikes the tree, and the philosopher tells you of the electrical condition of the atmosphere and of the earth, and of the passage of that mighty fluid from one to the other; to the savage or the child, Jove hurls his thunderbolt, and blasts and shivers the gnarled oak. The moon rules the tides by the laws of gravitation in our age and state of society; a direct act of power, in earlier ages, heaves up their billows, walks upon the waves, or piles them up into walls of defence for a chosen people. The moon is eclipsed: there are still those who see it pale and imperilled; some celestial monster is threatening to devour it, and gongs must fright the dragon from his prey. Showers water the earth: it was the opening of heaven's windows, the flood-gate which let out the superincumbent waters that were stored above. And when, in the retiring storm, the prismatic colours glittered amid the gloom, Jehovah had "set his bow in the cloud." The universe was undivided in those days; there was in all only one source of action or operation. There might be mistake, there might be confusion; but there was no division, none of that division which now runs through people's notions, and which makes such a strange confusion between the natural and the preternatural, the sacred and the profane. "Who gives you"—I once said to a child who had been well catechised, and who had been taught to look at and admire the progress of vegetation in the garden—"who gives you potatoes and cabbages?" "God Almighty," replied the child reverently. "And who gives you roast beef and pudding?" "Mary, the cook," replied the child. And the distinction was quite as reasonable as much that prevails throughout society, even at the present day, between the divine and the human. Some of our regiments run away before the enemy, or the harvest turns out badly—we hold a fast-day; the enemy runs away from us, and we proclaim a thanksgiving-day; when every day of every year has its monitions and grounds for thanksgiving, or for solemn feeling and earnest contemplation, far greater than these events which are picked out, as it were, as if there were Deity in them, and not Deity in the humblest, the commonest things that pass before our eyes from day to day and from hour to hour. The common we call nature, the uncommon

God. There is but one system, one Author, one plan in all.

Thus ignorance in its simplicity, thus the child left to himself, looks at nature; thus the savage in our times, when untutored by the interference either of native priests or of foreign missionaries, looks at it. And in his darkness and in his ignorance there is this great truth, which wiser persons and more enlightened ages for a time lost sight of, —that all things are one, that the same plan, laws, and principles obtain every where. This was so, as I said, at first; the divarication came, the division,—there was no help for it. The priests, who had the charge of religion, enforced the difference on one side; those who profited by observation, and had glimpses of the science that was to arise on the world, enforced it on the other. They could not pursue their observations and studies without doing so. Experience necessitated the difference. Then, people were taught to account in one mode for things with which they were familiar, and in another mode for things with which they were not familiar. Then arose those two great classes in the world, the priests and the philosophers,—at war with one another in the beginning, at war in their progress, at war still. But the priests had to deal with what was most wonderful, and this gave them most power. They endeavoured in every way to extend the region and sphere of their influence. Natural things they preternaturalised; their own scientific acquirements they turned to account, passing with the ignorant for those who could exercise the power of God. Enthusiasm aided them, often working its own wonders, which still went to widen the separation, and to swell the account of the marvellous. Perhaps unconscious mesmerism, or something of the sort, has existed from the very remotest ages; and mesmerism and miracle have affinities which, in a state of more accurate acquaintance with phenomena, may well become the theme of elaborate illustration. Perhaps the unconscious mesmeriser laid his hands upon the sick and healed them. Then, the priests were their own chroniclers; they worked miracles upon paper which have never been wrought any where else. They brought the facts of history into accordance with their own theory; they endeavoured to surround the notion of Deity with artificial obscurity, and to blind man to the reverence which the natural mystery of the subject must certainly produce, by artificial mysteries conjured up from the working of their own brains, and reflected to the heaven towards which they affected to point the way. Thus the breach grew wider and wider between the natural and the preternatural. Thus they demolished the unity of the universe, which even the child or the savage had perceived; they have subjected it to two kinds of powers, they have taught people to think they trace every where two sources of agency. We do not read religious books as we read other books—we do not investigate those religious topics which are the proper subjects of logical analysis in the same way as we scrutinise other topics. Causeless differences have been set up every where, those differences always answering the purpose of the classes who prevail over mankind, and rule them to their own advantage by means of the mystification thus superinduced.

In the first season or period, the human thought was one of a natural and instinctive, but yet ignorant, perception of the unity of things; in the next, in which science grew, and, for its own advance, was compelled to take an antagonistic attitude to the priesthood, there was a division, a divarication of the two kinds of agency: but a reunion has commenced, and is in rapid progress. And this is the common course of things in science and philosophy. The first perception is a truth, a truth almost instinctively perceived by the human intellect, and pure in its simplicity. With the progress of knowledge and investigation, and the conflict of opinion, science or philosophy becomes complex, multitudinous, full of distinctions and divisions. With a further progress of science, as it advances towards completeness, the simplicity which was the original perception and law reappears, as pure as at first, but more grand, more comprehensive, more satisfactory to the intelligence by which it is contemplated. This is the course of things in relation to the natural and the preternatural. In two ways has science, though constantly resisted by the theological party, been the great agency for commencing this reunion, —by correcting doctrines and dogmas, and by ministering to piety. It does both very often by the very same process. Ask the astronomer of the present day of his discoveries: let him tell of the perfect harmony which exists in our solar system; let him indicate the outlines of other systems, systems of central orbs at distances so remote that their attendant planets are invisible to our most powerful instruments; let him show in the heavens the process, as it were, of world-creation in the growth of the nebulæ; and when he has done, do you not feel that "the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork"? This science has done, giving to piety its higher flight and its ampler scope. And yet, while doing this, it has demolished that local heaven which originally was all the reward held out to the righteous, that to which they aspired, that in which they built the throne of God, that in which they saw his attendant angels and spirits, and the souls of the just, and where they hoped to go,—that heaven to which Elijah ascended in his fiery chariot, and Christ from the Mount of Olives. The same process has abolished the local heaven, and has magnified the heavens, until they become revelations of far higher authority than they have ever been, and are the contradiction of the mere theologian.

In proportion as this goes on, theology retreats, step by step, from those dogmas at which "reason stands aghast, and faith herself is half confounded." The unity of the world is again apparent; the preternatural abates, resolves itself into the natural, vanishes from sight. It is referred to a remote age; it is located in a remote region. Why do not we believe miracles as readily as people did eighteen centuries ago? It is not that there are not those who are desirous of working them, or who claim to work them. The mightiest Church in Christendom declares the power to be still inherent in the Church, and to be exercised from time to time. Priests, Catholic or Protestant, would delight to achieve miracles, if the miracles could be believed as well as achieved. It is not the difference of external evidence. Comparatively modern miracles have plenty of the sort of evidence on which theologians receive ancient miracles. Cases of the preternatural in witchcraft in this country were often upheld in a way which, if the thing itself were not incredible, would have been received as demonstration. There were witnesses in abundance, persons of high character and unimpeachable veracity, to the most extraordinary phenomena; there were occasionally the confessions of the parties themselves. And then, again, as to healing the sick, and similar results, the miracles wrought at the tomb of the Abbé Paris were certified in the most unquestionable way; they had evidence far greater than any which can attend records descending through a long course of ages, and of which the exact period of production, or the precise authorship, is incapable of being satisfactorily ascertained. And, accordingly, the common course of intelligent people in this day is, only to believe in the preternatural at a certain respectful distance. It must not come too near them, either in place or time, or it loses its character. And even at that remote distance, there is still a distinction: though there is a good deal of evidence for many of them, yet the heathen miracles are not to be received; only the Jewish and the Christian. Some make a further distinction here: they will receive the Christian, but not the Jewish miracles. All this is only the labouring of the mind to get out of that which sits like a nightmare upon it, the groaning of the intelligence, convinced that the world is either wholly natural or wholly preternatural,—call it which you will,—that, in short, it is governed on one plan, by one agency, and that the mighty power by which all things exist, the unfathomable agency by which they are arranged, the boundless love by which they are made the scenes of so much enjoyment and of such bright hopes, —that these, unchangeable in all ages, have cast no such shadow as that which would divide the world into the light of the natural and the darkness of the preternatural.

I therefore do not throw this class of topics entirely aside, but I do not make it mainly the means of elucidating the object of the course of lectures which I now commence. We may find in the world enough of the natural to satisfy our minds,—enough of the natural to gratify our organ of wonder, or whatever the craving be which seeks after and delights in that which gives us the impression of greatness and of majesty. We can find this more in the natural than in the preternatural. The progress of art and science outdoes miracle. If, now and then, the latter made the blind to see, the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak, art now gives the blind the book whose embossed letters create for him eyes at his fingers' ends, and enable him to read with ease; it imparts through the eye to the deaf that which others receive by means of sound, and it enables them to speak in the most distinct manner either by expressive signs or by written communication. If the leper was cleansed of old, what has not the healing art done in our days? With what diseases has it not grappled, and with what multitudinous sources of disease? If the dead be not raised, human life has been prolonged. For here and there a man to whose earthly existence a few short years are added, without his being able to give any account whatever of the state in which he was supposed to be for a few days, we have millions and millions of living creatures on earth, who continue to breathe, to exist, to feed, to feel, to act, to enjoy, and to hope, in consequence of the natural progress of natural sciences. We have enough in the natural to excite and to keep up a continual veneration in our minds for the all-pervading Spirit in which we and every thing exist,—no factitious majesty, no childish glitter of brazen altars and seas of molten metal, no depicting to the eye of forms which after all are but idealisations of the human form,—but the constant sense of a presence, an unseen presence, an existence within all existence, that is the life, the spring, the soul of all. If faith boasts its power of calming and sustaining, what are any interpositions, any arbitrary interferences with the course of things,—what are these, as the sources of a secure reliance, compared with that confidence which rests upon the certainty of laws never known to be violated,—which has a glimpse of the great chain of cause and effect that binds together actions and their results,—which premonishes, tells us beforehand, whither we are going, and what consequences will follow from our words or deeds? And if there be not in nature the pretended revelation, with which the world has often been amused, of another state,—if we find nothing there of Hades, where shadowy kings of Babylon sit upon their shadowy thrones,—nothing there of Elysian fields or of Tartarean torments,—nothing there of a Paradise with a tree of life, or a New Jerusalem whose gates are of precious stones,—yet we have there the instinctive impulse onward, the ineradicable hope, the pleading, as it were, within us of the voice of the Father of spirits, who cannot excite expectation which it is no part of the plan of his universe to follow with its gratification.

There is, then, I think, enough in the natural events of the history of Christ to guide us to his true spirit, his moral being, his religious aims: enough to show us how, while the wisdom of oriental contemplatists, of Greek philosophers, and of Egyptian sages, had flowed in upon Judæa, his mind knew how to select the wisest things of the wise, the purest precepts of the good,—enough to show us how native prophecy gave his soul impulse and elevation, by its majestic delineations of the majesty of Jehovah, and its glorious anticipations of futurity,—enough to show us how there was the power in him for that greatest of all miracles, the ascension of his soul towards the Father and Author of our spirits. And if so, we shall arrive at views more true and just, more sound and animating, than those which are the mere creatures of tradition, of dogma, or of speculation; and we shall arrive, too, at the best apology for that erring veneration which has overlaid his life with legend, his glory with worship, and his name with deification.

LECTURE II.

CHRIST'S SUMMARY OF PIETY AND GOODNESS.

November 3d, 1850.

IN pursuing the subject of this course of lectures,—namely, an inquiry into the true life of Christ, and its moral significance,—the first point to which I shall call your attention is, the summary which he gave of devotion and of duty. It is recorded in the 22d chapter of Matthew, the 35th and following verses:

"Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Here we have, in distinct terms, the notion which Christ entertained and inculcated of the great summary of human duty and action. It is put forth as such a summary; he represents it as the spirit of the religion of preceding ages, and as that with which whatever he had himself taught would be in perfect harmony. In this summary there is no proper novelty in the expressions. The precepts literally are found previously existing in the law of Moses. We have there both the command to love God and that to love our neighbour. The command to love God is in the 10th chapter of the book of Deuteronomy, the 12th and following verses:

"And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, to keep the commandments of the Lord, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good?"

Again, we find literally the injunction to love our neighbour in the 19th chapter of the book of Leviticus, the 13th and following verses:

"Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob him: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee until the morning. Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling-block before the blind, but shalt fear thy God: I am the Lord. Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour. Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people: neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbour: I am the Lord. Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him. Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the Lord."

The identity here is very obvious. But just look one moment at the dissimilarities, at the differences. The two precepts, to love God with all our heart, and to love our neighbour as ourselves, are literally repeated: but how stand they in the law of Moses,—how stand they in the teaching of Christ? In the first place, Christ puts them forward prominently,—he selects them from a crowd of precepts,—he assigns to them a paramount importance and authority over all the rest. In the old law they are undistinguished. What is the love of God, as worked out in detail in the old law? The observance of precepts,—the repetition of ceremonies. Who is the neighbour to be loved in the old law? It is the neighbour Jew; not the neighbour Gentile. The peculiarity of Christ's use of these expressions is, that he makes the devotion spiritual, and the neighbour man. He enlarges, he raises, he expands the words, until they assume an infinitely nobler meaning. And is not this indicative of character? Does not this show us something of the spirit of the man? Must we not admire the keenness of the eye that could detect these important precepts amid a crowd of ceremonial enactments,—the warmth of the heart that dwelt on them with delight,—

and the largeness of mind that gave them their elevation, their extension, their universality? For what were these precepts originally? and what were the most renowned observers of them, the patriarchs of the people whose law they constituted? The love of God and of men which they exemplified,—and exemplified with the approval of succeeding generations, with the sanction of prophets and of apostles,—did not deter Abraham from baring the sacrificial knife to the throat of his son; nor Jephthah from plunging the sacrificial knife in the bosom of his daughter. It praised Jael,—who drove the nail into the temple of the sleeping Sisera, who had fled to her tent for hospitality and refuge,—and called her "blessed among women for all coming generations." In the person of Samuel it hewed in pieces the captive king Agag, when he had every reason to believe that the bitterness of death had passed, "because the Lord would have war with Amalek from generation to generation." And, in the person of Joshua, it commanded and it perpetrated those tremendous massacres, in which neither age nor sex was spared, nor even domestic animals; but which were meant completely to clear the soil for the habitation of those who assumed, even in that bloody work, to be the chosen people of the Lord. These were not their crimes,—these were their virtues,—these were the doings for which they were held to be living in conformity with these precepts. What an immense distance separates them from the teacher of Nazareth! How large the space! and how much must we admire and do homage to the mind that could, in the depths of this gloomy mine, detect such resplendent loveliness as is embodied in his beautiful summary of duty! How much must we do it homage, although we see no reason here for the supposition of a descended God, or of a plenary and preternatural inspiration!

This change, from the ritual and external homage of Deity, to a spiritual and higher worship,—from the neighbour relation, or the neighbour countryman, to the neighbour man,—was not a sudden change; nor was it a change peculiar to the Jewish people. It was the result of advances which the human intellect had been making through long ages, thus arriving at a better comprehension of the attributes of its Maker, and of the claims of our brethren of the human race. That increase of light was not confined to Christ or to Judæa. In India, in Persia, in Greece, in Egypt, there had arisen those entertaining gradually purer and brighter views of God, and more loving feelings for humanity. There had been advance, even of those who were the most barbarous; and the very lawyer that tempted Christ with the question before cited would not have dared, in that day, to adhere strictly to what was deemed originally observance of such precepts; he would not have dared to advocate a mere external homage, or to have restricted the obligations between man and man to those that were of the race of Abraham. Every where progress had been made. It was the advancing genius of humanity; and the scriptures of the Jews were bright and radiant with a reflected lustre. Of the progress which had been made, we may give an instance in the purer conceptions of Deity, of goodness, of the great end and aim of human existence, which had been taught in Greece. I will quote, for instance, from Sir James Mackintosh's *History of Ethical Philosophy*, his description of the moral spirit of Plato. He says:

"In these circumstances, it must be difficult for the most learned and philosophical of his commentators to give a just representation of his doctrines, if he really framed or adopted a system. The moral part of his works is more accessible. The vein of thought which runs through them is always visible. The object is to inspire the love of truth, of wisdom, of beauty,—especially of goodness, the highest beauty,—and of that supreme and eternal mind, which contains all truth and wisdom, all beauty and goodness. By the love and delightful contemplation and pursuit of these transcendent aims for their own sake only, he represented the mind of man as raised from low and perishable objects, and prepared for those high destinies which are appointed for all those who are capable of them.

"The application to moral qualities of terms which denote outward beauty, though by him perhaps carried to excess, is an illustrative metaphor as well warranted by the poverty of language as any other employed to signify the acts or attributes of mind. The *beautiful* in his language denoted all that of which the mere contemplation is in itself delightful, without any admixture of organic pleasure, and without being regarded as the means of attaining any further end. The feeling which belongs to it he called *love,*—a word which, as comprehending complacency, benevolence, and affection, and reaching from the neighbourhood of the senses to the most sublime of human thoughts, is foreign from the colder and more exact language of our philosophy; but which, perhaps, then happily served to lure both the lovers of poetry and the votaries of superstition to the school of truth and goodness in the groves of the Academy. He enforced these lessons by an inexhaustible variety of just and beautiful illustrations,—sometimes striking from their familiarity,—sometimes subduing by their grandeur; and his works are the storehouse from which moralists have from age to age borrowed the means of rendering moral instruction easier and more delightful. Virtue he represented as the harmony of the whole-soul,—as a peace between all its principles and desires, assigning to each as much space as they can occupy without encroaching on each other,—as a state of perfect health, in which every function was performed with ease, pleasure, and vigour,—as a well-ordered commonwealth, where the obedient passions executed with energy the laws and commands of reason. The vicious mind presented the odious character, sometimes of discord, of war, sometimes of disease; always of passions warring with each other in eternal anarchy. Consistent with himself, and at peace with his fellows, the good man felt, in the quiet of his conscience, a foretaste of the approbation of God. 'Oh, what ardent love would virtue inspire if she could be seen!' 'If the heart of a tyrant could be laid bare, we should see how it was cut and torn by its own evil passions, and by an avenging conscience.'"

Here, then, we see the result of a calm pursuit of truth, without the pretence of preternatural communication with the unseen world,—here we see what had been effected in purifying and elevating the character of devotion and of morality. This had been done by Plato in Greece. And let not the recognition of advances made in one region be supposed to come at all into collision with advances made in another region. They are all parts and portions of one great progress, by which humanity has been led to know more of itself, its Author, and its end; and it was the beauty of the character of Christ that he saw the scattered beams of light that existed in previous communications—that he condensed them into one focus—that he elicited that summary so complete, that nothing can add to its perfection or detract from its excellence.

Not that I ascribe to his mind the exercise of any direct influence from those great masters who, in Greece at least, pursued their investigations on moral subjects. Jesus of Nazareth, the son of the carpenter, was an unlearned man. In that, his historians appear all to agree. It is scarcely likely that he ever read a page of Plato, or that he was familiar with the preserved lucubrations of oriental sages. Yet, by unlearned, in this sense, ignorance of what had been done on the subject of religion and morals is not to be assumed. There was the rich volume of the prophet-bards of Judæa open to his study, their views progressively rising higher and higher, surrounding the Deity with a majesty unknown to earlier conceptions of the Divine Patron of the Jewish people. There were such writings as those of Philo the Jew, and of Jesus the son of Sirach, the author of the Ecclesiasticus. These and similar works might have come within his reach. Nay, the atmosphere of Judæa must have received into it as an element the conceptions of men who inhabited other countries, but who, in the general communication of knowledge and of science, had sent their thoughts even to that remote and comparatively isolated region. Though the Jews were a separated people, yet all their separation could not blot out the cognisance of intelligence. They learned by commerce—they learned by captivity in other lands—they learned even by subjugation in their own land; and thus they attained to juster views of their God and of their fellow-creatures. Besides all these, there are the traditional notions of an early intercourse between Christ and the doctors or rabbis of his nation—the privilege of a child of questioning them in the Temple. There is the tradition also of the flight into Egypt—Egypt, then the centre of philosophical and theological speculation. But, whatever may be attributed to these sources, we must still believe the mind itself to have been in the purest harmony with human progress, when it could seize so readily, embody so tersely, and connect so wisely, the purest and highest morality with those notions that were already entertained by the Jews, and with the law which they reverenced. The perfection of this summary indicates a long growth of the individual mind, bringing it to its perfection; and there it stands—"Love God with all thine heart; love thy neighbour as thyself." What shall supersede it? What heresy renounces it? What rationalising brings it into question, or explains it away? What dogma can replace it? What church establishment can give it more firmness? What arguments or what teaching can recommend it with a stronger persuasion than that which is contained in its own simple language? There it abides and shines for ever. Doctrines and creeds and churches have cycles like the stars; they fulfil their motions, sometimes visibly, sometimes invisibly, sometimes in one part of the horizon, and sometimes in another; but this remains, like that fixed and central orb by which the mariner guides his course across the pathless ocean—the same, unchanging in its position and in its lustre.

And this principle is the model for the reformer. Ill understood was it, even at the very first; and we may still ask in what specific systems of religion it has been fairly wrought out. It was not embodied in the dogmas, in the prejudices, of the eleven Judaising apostles, nor in the speculations and mysterious dogmata of Paul, the Gentilising apostle. We cannot trace its lustre in the records of that obscure body, the primitive Christians, as they are called. It is not evolved in the ceremonies and state of the Papal power. We do not see it in worldly establishments, or in conflicting sects. They are not its genuine growth; nor are bishops, consecrated banners for warfare, nor excommunication. Talk of essential doctrines that must be believed for the salvation of the soul, anathemas and curses, divisions and subdivisions, and perpetual lines of sectarian demarcation,—these are not the germinating of the principle that we should love God and love man, and that in this is the soul and substance of all religion and morality. They overlay it—they add to, pervert, and distort it; and the wholesome reformation which they require is to be brought into accordance with its genuine dictates. And unless the reformer in religion does this, he does nothing. What else is there for him? To rationalise a doctrine, to explode a heresy, to correct an historical error,—what is all this? He may make another sect: there are sects enough already. It is only in endeavouring to enter into the spirit of this pure and beautiful declaration that he can fulfil the work of a reformer. Such persons sometimes talk of the original standard, the creed, and the discipline of the Christian Church, as to be found in the New Testament. What do we know of the Christians of that day? That they had just emerged from synagogue discipline. They had their observances, which were so interwoven with the customs of the country, that they could scarcely with propriety be transferred to other countries, among people of other customs. The two simplest ordinances, which are most generally retained by those who dissent from all other ceremonies—baptism and the Lord's supper—what are they? Baptism consists in the application of water—an appropriate and beautiful emblem, to oriental eyes, of inward and mental purification, but not such an emblem to our conception, requiring explanation, requiring texts and authority, and an observance by no means in accordance with our habits and customs. So the participation of wine, as well as bread, in commemoration of Christ. The wine is the rich man's beverage—what the poor Christian never tastes but upon that occasion. It was the common drink of the country in Christ's time and nation. It had meaning then: it was the simplest fare of the poorest as well as of the richest; it was a meal in which all might partake, without feeling that they were admitted to or mixed up with a different class of society from their own. They were the common elements that supported humanity. But the rite is lost with us—it ceases to have meaning; and therefore it ceases to be an appropriate expression of religious emotion or of moral principles. What such expressions best may be, I will not undertake to say on the present occasion; but to be genuine, good, useful, they should all be emanations from this one principle—that the great thing we have to do on earth, the most lovely and hopeful condition to which we can attain, is that of loving the Lord our God with our heart and soul, our mind and strength, and our neighbour as ourselves. Take these, with Christ's own illustration of them; and what more is needed? He found, indeed, the germ in Judaism, but only the germ; and it is a good guidance for the reformer ever to look in the past for the germ of that which he would realise in the future. Notions, feelings, theories, truth and goodness themselves, grow—are developed gradually; they partake of the character of reforms rather than of revolutions. Humanity is not revolutionary; it abhors abrupt and complete changes; it wants links of continuity between the past, the present, and the future. These Christ found in the adoption of ancient precepts in their ancient law, and in raising them to a higher sense; and those who labour for the good of their fellow-creatures, and for their own good in that, may do well to imbibe his spirit and follow his example.

And if they do so, it may fare with them as it did with him—that they will only attract censure, vituperation, and persecution in exchange for the benefits they bestow. And if they have his spirit, they will be content therewith; they will bow submissively—nay, reconcile themselves with and rejoice in that divine law which enacts that good for the many shall be won by the endurance of the devoted few.

LECTURE III.

CONTRAST OF CHRIST'S MORALITY WITH THAT OF THE WORLD.

November 10*th*, 1850.

IN this inquiry into the real life of Christ and its purport, the especial point to which I would direct attention this morning is, the contrast between the morality of Christ and that of the world. We are furnished with this contrast in the commencement of the Sermon on the Mount, as recorded in the 5th chapter of Matthew, in what are commonly known as "the Beatitudes:" "And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: and he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The parallel passage in the narrative of Luke is in the 6th chapter and the 20th and following verses. It had been previously stated that in those days he went up into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God; that he called his apostles, and that he descended with them and stood in the plain, in the company of his disciples and a great multitude of people. "And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said, Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh. Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets. But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep. Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets."

Before going further into the subject, I would just beg you to observe the discrepancies in these two reports. In the one instance, Christ ascends into a mountain to address the people, and there sits down to deliver his discourse; in the other account, he descends from a mountain into the plain, and there stands up to deliver his discourse. In the one case, the beatitudes are followed by denunciations; not so in the other. The report of Luke is much the shorter of the entire discourse; but in this part of it, it is lengthened by the insertion of a woe for every benediction. In the one instance, that of Matthew, the blessing is on spiritual attributes and qualities—on "the poor in spirit"—that is, as commonly interpreted, the lowly, and those conscious of their ignorance and of their feebleness; whilst in the other case, in Luke, it is simply a contrast of condition. The blessing is to the poor, as the poor; the denunciation is on the rich, as the rich; and the theory in Luke seems to be that of a reversal in the life which is to come of the states of men in this life—a notion which is entertained even at this day by many who have a sort of rough and rude conception of compensation, of those who are down-trodden in one stage of existence being themselves upraised and the treaders-down in another stage of existence.

Now, these are not immaterial discrepancies. They affect the external scenery and agency of the discourse; they affect the construction of the discourse; they affect the very spirit of the discourse. The introduction of maledictions with benedictions is no unimportant addition—or, if they really were there originally, the suppression of them is not unimportant. And there is altogether in these diversities enough, I think, to warrant the conclusion that, however much might have descended to the biographer in an incorrupt state, the uncertainty of tradition had yet been busy even with those best-ascertained peculiarities in the ministry of Christ; that it had spread uncertainty, had diminished, had added, had introduced variety of scope and tendency; and that these two records, therefore, do not bear the character of the records of attentive hearers, taken while even the external physical attitudes were fresh in their recollection; and that still less do they bear the character of inspired biographies, guided absolutely to the truth in every particular, important or unimportant, by a Divine influence. I say that this comparison, this discrepancy—unimportant as it may seem when contrasted with many that might be named—is alone sufficient to destroy that theory of plenary inspiration which is the foundation of so much dogmatism and of so many dogmas; which affects to preclude all discussion the moment the sense of a text is ascertained; which appeals to external evidence, and then assumes that whatever is recorded is to be taken with the most unquestioning faith; and which, by these theories, has enslaved the human mind, deluded and blinded the power of reason, made men tamper with their clear convictions, led to the stretching of sentences and texts beyond all the boundaries of a candid and rational interpretation, and originated a world of equivocations and hypocrisies under the name of religion.

I say, too, that these records—taken with reference to the evidence they bear of being the subsequent writings of men who did not compose immediately from their own personal impressions—are fatal to the theory of the proper deity and consequent infallibility of Christ himself. A God uttering oracles on earth would be indeed an object for the world's profoundest attention, and for the unquestioning reception of whatever such oracles asserted. Had there been such an interposition, we may fairly assume that great care would have been taken to preserve the oracles strictly, verbally, literally, according to their original enunciation. There would have been no such diversities, in terms or in spirit, as to leave us doubtful whether the poor in a spiritual sense or the poor in a pecuniary sense only were intended as the objects of a benediction. There would have been no such diversities as to leave us doubtful whether the rich in an intellectual sense, or the rich in a worldly sense, or the rich who abuse their means and advantages, or the rich absolutely, were intended as the objects of a malediction. There would have been no want of harmony as to time, place, person, attitude, or any thing connected with the delivery of such oracles. There would have been, in fact, a very different kind of record from that which we actually possess. I am not speaking now of mere differences of interpretation. Differences of interpretation alone may exist where the words are most absolutely ascertained; because different men will throw the light of their own minds, with all the peculiarities therewith connected, upon the object of their contemplation. It is sometimes said, as a parallel case, that there have been diversities of opinion in astronomy. True; there have been great diversities in astronomical systems—but what then? In these various interpretations of the stars, there have been always the objects themselves to appeal to. Astronomers may tell different tales; but there are the stars shining in their unchanging lustre; they speak for themselves, and their voice goes forth through the heavens and to the ends of the earth. This case, therefore, is not parallel. But let us suppose that, upon a time, all astronomical observations ceased; let us suppose that the telescope is demolished, that the observatory is levelled with the ground, that the nightly watching of the heavens and marking of the courses of the stars is forbidden,—or at least that the practice is discontinued; let us suppose that the press is compelled to suspend its operations with reference to astronomy, and that all that we knew of it would be from traditionary and diversified reports of what, some two centuries ago, certain astronomers said that they observed and that they accurately recorded, but which they have recorded with discrepancies that we are unable to reconcile. Where, then, would astronomy be? Just where orthodox Christianity is. It would not be in a condition to claim infallibility; it would not be in a state to demand the prostration of the understanding; it would be in a confused condition, requiring freedom of thought, boldness and extent of research, diligence of inquiry and investigation, in order to extricate it from the chaos in which two such centuries would have plunged astronomy, and in which many more centuries have plunged Christianity.

There is no appearance in the sayings of Christ of their being handed down as the oracles of a Deity incarnate, living and speaking amongst mortals. There were no such care, preparation, and cautiousness on his part, or on that of his immediate followers, as are necessarily implied in such a supposition; without which, indeed, the oracles of a descended God would be valueless, because their integrity could never be satisfactorily ascertained. What avails the infallibility of the speaker, if it is modified and obscured by the fallibility of the reporters—by the fallibility of a number of reporters? What avails the perfect unity of his doctrine—though on all occasions it were as one entire and perfect chrysolite—if it is reflected through different minds, and comes before us with diversities, distortions, and contradictions? We must look further than this. We must seek that guidance on moral questions which is the surest guidance,—the tendencies of human nature, the will of our Creator as communicated to us by the very formation of our bodies and of our minds, aided by the circumstances in which we are placed. We must seek here for that which will help us to determine between the correct and the incorrect in moral precepts; and a mere preceptive morality, obscured by traditions and records, has never yet sufficed for man's guidance, nor ever will. Christ taught no creed, founded no church, gave no such directions as would have been called for if we suppose that he himself regarded his words in the same way as modern expositors affect to regard them. He did nothing of this sort; he assumed nothing of the incarnate Deity revealing universal and everlasting oracles. He walked as a man amongst men, as a brother amongst brethren,—his mind full of pure light, his heart full of warm love; and what mind and heart constrained him to speak, that, to like-minded men, and even to those who refused to hear, he did speak,—casting the good seed with liberal hand upon the ground, and leaving it to grow or perish, as the soil was good, or the ground was thorny and stony.

The difference between Christ's morality as condensed into the "beatitudes,"—on which I place more reliance in the form in which they occur in Matthew, without the maledictions, and as applied to spiritual rather than to physical qualities,—the contrast between the morality of Christ thus developed—a contrast intimated by the "beatitudes" themselves—and the morality of the world, was then what it is now. The difference has undergone little change through the eighteen centuries that have elapsed. The world has become nominally Christian, and these "beatitudes" are read in churches and preached upon in pulpits, and verbally they are held in the profoundest reverence, as the infallible guides to life everlasting: but what is the fact? Now, who really covets the blessings of poverty, whether of circumstances or of spirit? Who craves after it? Who renounces wealth, in broad lands or well-filled purses, for the sake of enjoying that benediction which they ascribe to a descended God? Do the very teachers of religion do this? Are they ever prepared to do it, whilst solemnly announcing these declarations from their pulpits, and insisting upon the unquestioning submission of all consciences to their dictates? Do they even dream of it? When I say that the morality of the world is in contrast with the morality of Christ, I include what is called the Church in the world, with which it takes part in this matter and casts in its lot. Are we very solicitous now after the blessings of the meek? Is it our common practice when the right cheek is smitten to turn the left? Do we respect the man who does this? Have we not a greater reverence for him who modestly, but firmly and temperately, asserts his rights, and who will not compromise in his own person the rights of his fellow-countrymen and his fellow-creatures? Are we eager for the blessing of persecution? Or, if modern religion is to have any thing to do with persecution, is it not more likely to be on the wrong side of the question? Run through the "beatitudes," and construe them as you will, according to any fair rules of interpretation, and you will still find that they are held only in verbal reverence. Their business is done when they have been announced and responded to within the walls of church or chapel. They were not then the guidance of life; they are not now the guidance of life. The homage paid to them only connects itself with a craving for the subjugation of thought and mind and speech to certain forms of words, which are reiterated in the temple of God, and which men are commanded to appreciate, as if by mere words either goodness could be attained here, or heaven's blessing could be procured in the enjoyment of eternal existence hereafter.

No, they are still at war; and there are reasons why they should be so. For, beautiful as is the moral spirit of Christ; much as some of these beatitudes commend themselves to our moral sense; exalted as they may be, in some respects, in the characters which they form, I do not think we are warranted in altogether condemning the world's morality in some of these particulars. The pursuit of wealth by fair, honest, honourable means,—means which, while they tend to enlarge the comforts of the individual, and to relieve him from a life of scarcely endurable toil, tend also to increase the enjoyments of his fellow-creatures, to raise the condition of the poor, and, by cheapening articles of merchandise, to bring them within reach of those who must else have passed all their lives in a state of privation,—I say, in this there is nothing worthy of the absolute condemnation which, sometimes in the pulpit, and sometimes in a book, has been hurled at the desire for riches, but which the common sense of mankind has never yet consented to adopt as a practical rule of life. I repeat, too, that the manly defence of just rights is not the abrogation of a divine duty,—a duty to God, to society, and our own conscience; but that, on the contrary, it is on many occasions most imperatively required of men; and that to shrink from it is to act unworthily of any claim to the character of a true, just, and useful man upon earth. Persecution is not to be courted. If it comes upon us unavoidably, it may be wholesome in its results upon the mind, but it is scarcely possible to appreciate it as a blessing to be desired. It is better, if we can, to escape unharmed, to pursue our course of quiet thought, and tell out our free speculations to the world, that other minds may take up the subjects we have pursued, and pursue them in their way, and arrive at truth with us, or arrive at truth which we have missed, however honest and earnest in its pursuit.

The fact ought not to be obscured that, in these "beatitudes," the morality of Christ—worthy still of his pure enlightenment and lofty mind—had reference to a time, to a nation, to a class. It had reference to a people that had no political institutions, who did not know what the institutions were which are held essential to free and good government in modern times,—a nation by whom such things were as yet scarcely conceived of; for they had never found their way beyond the boundaries of the old free cities and states of Greece, where indeed they existed in a form which, however grand in itself, was incapable of extension to large communities and wide-spread empires. They knew nothing of political institution; they had no such thing, with all its rights, its duties, and its powers. The Hebrew nation was in a state of slavery; they had been subjugated by Rome; there was the force which had struck down the independence of their country. Hence, they looked more to individual goodness and well-being than to civic and social rights. Their morality was necessarily modified by their condition of servitude; for that which may be a duty to the slave is no duty necessarily to the free. I say that the "beatitudes" contemplated a class; they are imbued with the spirit of the Essene sect amongst the Jews,—the best of Jewish sects, the purest,—and one with which, it has been plausibly conjectured, John the Baptist was associated, and after him Christ, in his earlier years. The Essenes, of whom such interesting descriptions have been left us by Philo, writing anterior to the ministry of Christ, and by Josephus after him, were a peaceful and a loving people. Much enthusiasm there might be in them, —some touch of fanaticism; but still they led beautiful lives; they dwelt apart; they renounced individual property; they had a grander stimulus to industry than that which arises from personal appropriation, or from transmission to one's descendants; they had their common stock, created by their common labour, which appears never to have failed of its purpose, and from which they drew their frugal means of support. They lived on simple fare; they wore simple clothing; they avoided large cities, with their contaminations; their establishments throve in remote and rural districts. The wayfaring man was welcome to their hospitality, their free hospitality; the sick were welcome to their medical skill, so eminent that sometimes they were called "the healers," and miraculous cures were, as a natural consequence, in that age and country, ascribed to their agency. Thus they lived, unresisting, submissive, meek, meditative,—in their way walking with God, and loving men. The preservation of their *morale*, in the form of the "beatitudes," is a proof of this. There are perhaps some few such now,—not of the world; the world knows them not; but the spirit of Christ acknowledges them; and, when they close their harmless lives, and pass into their nameless graves, the benediction of earth and of heaven rests upon their course and its completion.

And now, considering the temporary interest which is rife in this metropolis and through the country, I will conclude this discourse by asking, what the spirit of the "beatitudes" incarnate in a disciple of Christ—in a modern Essene—would say to the vehement contest which has just been set up in this country? What would it think of that grand Protestant appeal, and that outcry of renewed conflict between the Protestant and the Papal Churches, of which all the world hears so much just at the present moment? I think such a one would wonder at the utter insignificance of the occasion for this stunning and overwhelming outbreak. What has happened? An old man at Rome, who calls himself the bishop of the world, has authorised other men, old or middle-aged, to call themselves bishops in this country, and to call themselves bishops of particular places in this country. With regard to which, the only common-sense commentary seems to be, "Well, and what then?" One of these is to wear a red hat and red stockings; and still we ask, "And what then?" People have often made themselves fantastic figures, by bedizening themselves with the external symbols of power, which those who please may reverence, and at which those who please may smile; and there an end. A Popish bishop of Westminster! And why not? In Scotland, Presbyterianism is the established religion of the country, and a pretty strict religion too in guarding its rights as an establishment; and yet there are Church bishops of Edinburgh and of Glasgow. "Superintendent" is "bishop" turned into English; and the Methodists have their superintendents of Lancashire and of Middlesex, with other territorial denominations. If the papal religion is to be tolerated at all, the papal priesthood must be tolerated with it; for the priesthood is a most essential part of the religion. Nor is this peculiar to the Roman-Catholic system. If not in form, yet in spirit and in substance, a priesthood is essential to sundry other forms of religion.

against which we hear no vituperation at the present moment. We should not be blind to violations of the principle of religious liberty and equality, merely because bishops with dioceses, that imply territorial limitation, of one Church, are jealous of a similar arrangement in the Church of a different faith, and that too of an older and more extensive faith. If occasions for complaint against Catholicism be sought for, much more serious ones than this might be found, which have passed comparatively unnoticed. When the Catholic hierarchy in Ireland set its face against what it called "the godless colleges," because there was a prospect that science would be honestly taught in those colleges; and when the same priesthood in England obstructed the education of the poor, and refused the government grant, unless those priests were allowed an absolute control over all the books and teaching to be employed in those schools,—they did a much more offensive thing, and committed a very much larger encroachment upon the honest civil rights of their fellow-subjects, than all this creation of cardinals and bishops, and these allotments of sees, whether of Westminster or of Birmingham. But against this a similar outcry could not be raised, because Protestant sects, established and unestablished, have done their part too in obstructing education, unless the scientific and the secular are brought completely under the control and the dominion of the theological.

Such an incarnation of the "beatitudes" would see in this an unworthy and a worldly quarrel. He would look at it as a strife, in which the pursuit was earthly, and not heavenly. And this territorialism, which is the great offence, but which exists in other Churches—what is it? If it be offensive in one, so is it in all. Why should there not be a Catholic bishop of Westminster, over which a Protestant bishop has already jurisdiction? What right have any of them to pretend to any jurisdiction over conscience, either in that district or any where else, except in so far as conscience submits voluntarily to their control, and seeks for their guidance? If the territorial rights of our bishops be invaded, such rights in themselves are wrongs. If any thing more is meant than simply teaching and guiding those who are willing to submit to such teaching and guiding, the territorial demarcation in connection with religion is a usurpation altogether, which ought to be ignored, repudiated, and abolished, by whatever sect, party, or Church such a right is sought to be exercised. And here is, in fact, perhaps, the real gist of the matter. What is called the Protestant Church does claim dominion over people simply because they live within certain districts, though in those districts they may profess a very different faith from the bishop who is set over the locality by either authority. Ought any such jurisdiction to be possessed by any body? Do we not see its evils? Are not its exactions felt—for instance, in those requirements of fees for a corpse carried out of a parish, whatever might have been the faith, practice, or communion of the party when living, by the clergyman of that parish, which so long obstructed, and which at last mangled, the sanitary measure for the removal of burials from within the walls of crowded cities? In all this there is only one class of usurpation at war with another class of usurpation—both of them to be put down by the growth of more just opinions, and by free institutions in accordance with those opinions.

I think, too, such a person would be disgusted by the kind of language which is used and encouraged on this subject. Ribald tongues are let loose upon Popish ceremonies with a license which would not be tolerated if they were called Protestant ceremonies, though quite as unreasonable. I know that there are doctrines, there are observances, which it is rather difficult to treat with respect; but still, where good taste intimates that such respect should as much as possible be observed—nay, where the law has interposed, in order to enforce the externality of respect; for what are the laws against blasphemy and infidelity, under which, at one time, so many hundred persons were incarcerated in this country?—by all means, let such respect be shown. It was always professed, by the judges who presided and by the counsel even who pleaded, that these laws were not to check any freedom of opinion—that men might deny Christianity, if they pleased—but that they must not be abusive, indecently vituperative; they must not rail; they must withhold their lips from speaking words of reproach and contumely. Very well, then; let the Protestant Church, as it calls itself, give this respect now to the more ancient Church and to the more ancient doctrine. It is not a becoming sight for clergymen to be stimulating a species of language which they would not tolerate for an instant in reference to their own dogmas or observances, whatever they be. We hear, for instance, continually about the absurdity of "the wafer God." We have it placarded upon effigies and Protestant vans. In fact, every thing is Protestant now, in this violence of our outbreak; nor would it be surprising now to find an announcement that none but Protestant polkas would be danced in any of the casinos. But those who smile at a "wafer God" should remember that the mystery of transubstantiation is not greater than the mystery of incarnation. If one faith puts the Deity on a plate, both faiths lay the Deity in a manger and nail him to a cross. You can only believe the one by being told that it is a miracle, about which you are not to reason at all; and why is not the same plea good for the other mystery? In fact, the mystery of transubstantiation has this advantage—that it is literally expressed in the words of scripture ascribed to Christ: "This is my body"—a declaration which, for clearness and directness,—of course it may be explained away, as every text may be explained away,—is beyond any declaration that can be adduced in favour of the orthodox doctrine of the incarnation. A little more propriety and decency, then, would be becoming in men who should be preachers of peace, but who—I will not say intentionally—but by the tendency of their language of late days—seem rather to indulge in excitements to outrage. Nor can we hope, if this stimulus be perseveringly applied, but that outrages will happen. Some few police cases have already occurred, and more will occur; and we must look to the good sense of the laity, and to the impartial conduct of the government, to preserve order, and to prevent a repetition of such scenes as have, on one occasion in the last century, disgraced this metropolis and this country.

This word "Protestant," too—what do those who now clamour about it so violently, and who sing "God save the Queen" in churches because they are Protestants—what do they mean by it? What is Protestantism? It is not a dogma—it is not a ceremony—it is not a Church.

Protestantism, if it be any thing at all, is the right, the individual right, of private judgment in matters of religion. This was the only justification of Luther and all the reformers; but for this right, they were all guilty of schism and sin in their rebellion against the authority of Rome; and unless this right be a sound and a valid one, Rome is the Church still to which all consciences ought to bow in submission. Protestantism, I say, is the right of private judgment in matters of religion. Do they appreciate that right, do they contend for that right, do they possess that right,—those who shout so loudly against Popery? Where is Protestantism in this country? It is not in the Church of England. Those who enforce a subscription to a long list of articles—articles of which a bishop has confessed that he did not know a clergyman who ever believed them entirely — those who enforce such a subscription, and make it also a test at the very entrance upon a course of academical study—what business have they to pollute the word "Protestant" by taking it into their mouths? They may not be Papal; but at any rate they are not Protestant.

I say, Protestantism does not exist in the Church of England; and there is not too much of it amongst the dissenting churches. We are yet a long way from freedom of speech, and even from freedom of thought, on matters of religion, in that completeness in which they ought to be cherished, and to which we have a right, if the Protestant principle is indeed to be recognised as the guide of legislation. Towards that principle, I trust, the sound sense and right feeling of this country will continue to advance, notwithstanding the inducements to a temporary aberration; but first and foremost of all things must be held sacred the right of every individual to exercise his free judgment upon religious topics. And if so, we may trust that society will know its interests and its duties better than a considerable portion of the public sometimes seem to know them; and that it will be understood that the business of society is to guard the rights of the associations called churches; to prevent their injuring or exercising violence upon one another; to impede their zeal when it becomes too furious; to redress their wrongs, if in any thing they are injured and oppressed; to keep churchism from interfering with individual rights; to look at men, not as members of churches, but as inheritors of a rational nature, and children of God; and treating them according to this rule, to preserve them on the broad level of equality, and to unite them in the holy bonds of brotherhood.

LECTURE IV.

On Idealising Christ.

November 17th, 1850.

Every Christian idealises Christ. And this happens, whatever be the theory, creed, doctrine, or point of view from which he contemplates the character. Whether Christ be to him God upon earth, or simply the human founder of a human religion,—whether he be an angel incarnate, veiled in human flesh, or a real man like ourselves, with like feelings and passions,—whether he be looked at simply as a teacher and exemplar, or as the propitiatory sacrifice for the sins of mankind,—still, every Christian idealises Christ. And this must needs happen. He is the centre of Christianity,—of that Christianity which has prevailed so widely and so long, over so many countries, through so many ages,—of that Christianity which, beginning with the lowliest classes of the people, won its way to the highest places, and installed itself in imperial Rome,—of that Christianity which humbled the religions of the past, overthrew their altars, and demolished or reconsecrated their temples to a purer worship,—of that Christianity which has been associated with the most gorgeous ceremony, with the most rich and varied offerings that art could bring, and also associated with the strictest and sternest simplicity,—of that Christianity which has been leagued with so many forms of government, incorporated with states, and, at other times, predominating over all forms of political institution,—of that Christianity which has been debased and sullied by persecutions, degraded by sordidness and hypocrisy, and yet resplendent in grandest intellects, noblest virtues, meekest endurance, and most godlike sacrifices;—of that Christianity Christ is the leading character, the central point; and it must needs happen that Christians will idealise him. He is connected with the most complicated features and forms that belong to religion; and if we ascend to its simplest elements—if we take those principles wherein it appears stripped of all adjuncts, and devoid of all applications—love to God and love to man—we have Christ's summary of duty and of devotion.

This tendency to idealise the character of Christ is strengthened by the manner in which he is made known to us of these ages, by the very imperfections of the records of his life, abounding as those imperfect records yet do with irresistible indications of the prevailing spirit of his mind, of his real character and life. For how imperfect are these evangelical narratives, considered as biographies! Of what thousands of men do we know many more particulars than we do of Jesus of Nazareth! How much more minute the records,—how much more ample and consecutive the detail of facts! The biographies of Christ are but the fragments of fragments. What are their elements? Criticism unerringly detects in them the vestiges of prior documents, writings, and records that have passed away, and are gone for ever into the gulf of oblivion, but which the writers of the gospels used, and the supposition of which is necessary to account both for their discrepancies and for their verbal agreements. They were formed from traditions—misty, floating traditions—traditions which had accumulated through a considerable course of years—and those traditions varied also by the different tendencies of people in different localities; some adding in one way, and some in another, until the same original transaction appears in different forms, which seem scarcely capable of identification. They were addressed to different classes of persons, different in their manners, habits, and language, different in their forms of government, different in their previous notions of religion,—one evangel for the Jew, and another for the Gentile,—one constructed for the latitude of Syria, another for that of Rome, and another for that of Alexandria. There are the varieties arising from these different principles, all affecting the narrative; and the idiosyncrasy of each writer too, a medium which colours all things, exercising its power, whatever the nature of the fact, or the degree of evidence. How much must be left to the intellectual penetration and faculties of the reader! And what is the amount in quantity? Look at that as well as at the quality. Biographies now—even passing over very much indeed that is interesting—soon spread into volumes. And what a little book is any one of the gospels! You may read each of them through in an hour or thereabouts. And this is all that the writer had to tell us of a life of upwards of thirty years,—a life passed in a country strange to us, with manners and customs widely differing from our own! This little is all our possession and our guidance, requiring more in us than in it,—calling forth the powers of attention, of industry, of careful investigation, of clear imagination, and of just conception,—stimulating these faculties in us, exercising them when stimulated, and rewarding them, when exercised, by the development to us of a simple, an harmonious, a beautiful character, that fixes itself at once in the mind and heart, and in both assumes its rightful ascendency.

And in being thus left to the conceptions and the idealisation of future times, there is no absolute peculiarity as to Christ. The same thing holds of many historical characters, which are little more perhaps than historical names, and yet which live to us, live with a greater reality, with a more active vital principle, than many others which have been recorded by contemporary historians and poets. How many instances of this kind might be adduced,—exemplifications of that mental operation which I am endeavouring to show must have been gone through with regard to the character and the life of Christ! Sardanapalus is one of the living men of antiquity,—one of its mighty emperors: and yet, what know we of him? A vague tradition of the burning of his palace, and a brief inscription recorded of his estimate of life. How much for ages was known of the character of Joan of Arc,—the condemned witch, the burnt sorceress, the despised impostor,—on whose memory the hatred, the revenge, the scepticism, and the ribaldry of ages piled up their monstrous assumptions? until the poetical and philosophical spirit detected in all this the true-hearted woman, the genuine enthusiast, the real heroine, and did justice where history, annals, and criticism had failed,—a justice confirmed by dusty records drawn from ancient archives, where they had long been stored and neglected. Idealisation arrived at the truth; whilst those who pride themselves upon their logical powers and their plodding investigation totally failed, and committed the grossest injustice. In fact, we may much more reasonably, in many cases, infer the external events from the character, than we can infer the character from the external events. There is an instance of this in one of Emerson's Lectures on Representative Men,—I mean in his description of Swedenborg, and in the way in which he commences his account of that extraordinary man. He says:

"All religious history contains traces of the trance of saints: a beatitude, but without any sign of joy; earnest, solitary, even sad; 'the flight,' Plotinus called it, 'of the alone to the alone:' *μύησις*, the closing of the eyes,—whence our word 'mystic.' The trances of Socrates, Plotinus, Porphyry, Behmen, Bunyan, Fox, Pascal, Guion, Swedenborg, will readily come to mind. But what as readily comes to mind is the accompaniment of disease. This beatitude comes in terror, and with shocks to the mind of the receiver. 'It o'er-informs the tenement of clay,' and drives the man mad, or gives a certain violent bias, which taints his judgment. In the chief examples of religious illumination, somewhat morbid has mingled, in spite of the unquestionable increase of mental power. Must the highest good drag after it a quality which neutralises and discredits it?

> 'Indeed it takes
> From our achievements, when performed at height,
> The pith and marrow of our attribute.'

Shall we say that the economical mother disburses so much earth and so much fire, by weight and meter, to make a man, and will not add a pennyweight, though a nation is perishing for a leader? Therefore the men of God purchased their science by folly or pain. If you will have pure carbon, carbuncle, or diamond, to make the brain transparent, the trunk and organs shall be so much the grosser; instead of porcelain, they are potter's earth, clay, or mud.

"In modern times no such remarkable example of this introverted mind has occurred as in Emanuel Swedenborg, born in Stockholm in 1688. This man, who appeared to his contemporaries a visionary and elixir of moonbeams, no doubt led the most real life of any man then in the world; and now—when the royal and ducal Fredericks, Cristierns, and Brunswicks of that day have slid into oblivion—he begins to spread himself into the minds of thousands. As happens in great men, he seemed by the variety and amount of his power to be a composition of several persons, like the giant fruits which are matured in gardens by the union of four or five single blossoms. His frame is on a larger scale, and possesses the advantages of size. As it is easier to see the reflection of the great sphere in large globes, though defaced by some crack or blemish, than in drops of water, so men of large calibre—though with some eccentricity of madness, like Pascal or Newton—help us more than balanced mediocre minds.

"His youth and training could not fail to be extraordinary. Such a boy could not whistle or dance, but goes grubbing into mines and mountains, prying into chemistry and optics, physiology, mathematics, and astronomy, to find images fit for the measure of his versatile and capacious brain. He was a scholar from a child, and was educated at Upsala."

What I wanted to point out is, the ease with which theory slides into narrative, so that one scarcely knows whether the boyhood and juvenile scholarship of Swedenborg are depicted simply by the philosophical lecturer, or whether they are taken from the authentic records of the school or college, or from other documents of that time. It is an instance of what I mean,—that the perception of character suggests, conveys, implies, often more distinctly than external record, the ways or mode of life which such a being must necessarily have led. So I think it is in relation to Christ; and by arriving—as in this course of lectures I am endeavouring to do—at a just conception of his mind and spirit, at a notion of the power that was in him, we are more likely to understand the external realities, than we are even from the critical analysis of the imperfect documents which remain to us.

All Christians, as I said, idealise Christ; but of course their idealisation is in their own way, according to the fashion, tendency, and spirit of their own minds. And by the conceptions which they form of him, we may tell the character of the idealist. Each man's Christ is different. Tell me what your Christ is, and I will tell you what you are. Some pretend an art of knowing character from the handwriting. There is a surer art by which it may be deciphered, in the conceptions and idealisings of the individual mind. How do you write Christ? In the old Roman hand, in old English text, in modern Italian, in graceful Greek, or in those cumbrous, antique Hebrew characters? Show me what you think of him, and it discloses what the thinker is. You begin your portrait with telling me that he is the second person in the Trinity; that there are three infinite, coequal, and coeternal persons, of whom he is one, the second in order though not in time; that he is a Son as ancient as his Father; and that the Holy Spirit, which proceeds from both, existed from eternity with both. Then you go on to state how he became incarnate, to offer an infinite satisfaction for the infinite sins of humanity. That is enough,—I know you. You are a man of dogma, —a man whose religion is a bundle of abstruse propositions; a creature of creeds; one whose religion may perhaps play around the head, but certainly comes not near the heart. Or, will you tell me that Christ was an incarnate spirit, in fashion only a man; that he was lower than Divinity or the archangels, but higher than humanity; that he did a work on earth, and was rewarded for it with a more exalted position in heaven;—will you go on with puerilities and complications like these? Again I say, I know you. You are a timid, textual man, seeking to reconcile words and phrases, without grasping at their realities. Or, do you glory in him as a reformer? Do you delight in his stern rebukes of the Pharisees, and study with infinite gusto his expositions of passages in the Old Testament, and the different applications which he gave them from what rabbinical authority had sanctioned? Do you especially refer to his denunciations, so stern and awful, of the hypocritical professors of his day? Again I say, I know you: you are a controversialist; you like argument better than feeling; and you think that in demolishing a sophism you are doing much toward the saving of a soul. I might go on with a variety of characters. They all show themselves in their delineations of that which is presented to them, indeed, only in outline for their minds to fill up; until we come to those who tell us of Christ that he received children when his disciples forbade them to approach him,—that he consorted with the poor, the wretched, the diseased,—that he appreciated benevolence and compassion in the heretic Samaritan; and again I say, I have found a man who shows himself in his Christ, and whose heart is the abode of philanthropy.

And is there, then, no real Christ? Is it all a phantasm of each individual mind, seen only by each individual eye? That were, indeed, a rash conclusion. Why, men have different conceptions of the sun. Some say that it is a substance opaque, and some that it is essentially luminous; some have maintained that it moves, whilst others have demonstrated that it is fixed. But what of those differences? The sun is there just the same; it rises in the morning, and the birds rejoice, and hail it with their songs, and vegetation glows with brighter colours; the sun pursues its course, and man goes to his work or his enjoyment; at night it sinks in splendour;—still it remains, notwithstanding these theories. So shines Christ in the moral world. Only, do not look for him in creeds and articles and propositions; do not look for him in ecclesiastical organisations,—spiritual clubs to plunder one portion of mankind and enrich another, to enslave one portion of mankind and invest another with authority and domination. Do not seek him in the dictates of the baseness that bargains for salvation, makes a compact with Divine justice, and offers so much suffering of the innocent for so much transgression by the guilty. Do not seek for him in the exercise of an open-mouthed credulity, that can swallow any wonder, and is the more delighted to swallow, the larger be the wonder. There is a real Christ beyond and through all this. "Unto us a child was born, unto us a son was given;"—although it may not be true that the chorussing angels sang in the clouds to the shepherds tending their flocks in the valley below, or that a new star appeared in the heavens, and guided the royal magians from the east to offer their adorations. The child grew; although it may be very apocryphal that the daggers of Herod's retainers were dyed in infantile blood, or that angels counselled a flight into Egypt, and marshalled the way thither across the wilderness. Angels—spirits of grace and power—were descending upon him, though there might be no winged figures in the air, as he grew in grace and in knowledge, developing intellectual and moral qualities, and already feeling that impulse of love to God and to mankind. The child thus grew in grace, and the stars of old shone upon him with their lights, and the song of prophet-bards was in his ears, and he was proclaimed the beloved son of God by a voice which reaches the heart sooner than any thunderous tone from the clouds, and by deeds that impressed the feelings more deeply than any descending dove alighting upon his head to testify his mission. He was tempted, sorely tried, no doubt, with hard and inward conflicts; and the temptation was not the less real because no fallen angel was there in visible garb, quoting scripture, or bearing him upon his dusky wings to the pinnacle of the temple or to the mountain's top. He was and did good, and went about doing good, and was the friend of sinners and the guide of the wretched; he healed the sick spiritually,—nay, it is most probable that he healed the sick corporeally, by such science as perhaps ancient Egypt taught and some in modern times may practise, although in that there was nothing of the supernatural, the preternatural, or the unnatural. And he died; his death not the less beautiful, not less lovely and affecting, even if the sun was not totally eclipsed that day, nor the veil of the temple rent from top to bottom, nor the graves opened, the shrouded bodies of ancient saints issuing from them to walk along the streets of Jerusalem. He also ascended to heaven, and in a surer way and by a more direct route than any corporeal ascent from the top of a mountain until hidden by the passing clouds. Marvels are not morals. One deed of love and pity is more divine than all of them; one great and exalted thought is grander than all the prodigies that ever were perpetrated or that ever were imagined.

And yet let us not despise legend and tradition. They have their worth, and a genuine worth. There is often in them a beauty and a meaning which we may do well to contemplate, and, if we can, to draw forth and bring into connection with the sterner realities of life. The legends that so soon sprang up and circulated about the birth and the life of Christ, what were they but a more exalted expression of that same feeling which led the multitude to say, "We will make him a king"? They made him more than a king. They showed the promptness with which the Jewish feeling connected the idea of the Messiah with him, and how it first associated with him whatever was understood to be ancient prediction about the Messiah. The obscure saying of the prophet became the recorded reality of the biographer. And so with the speculations, with the glorification, which had a Gentile rather than a Jewish origin. They were all testimonies of veneration, love, gratitude. The powers of the mind, the exercise of the fancy, —all were stimulated to bring together whatever they could of good and bright, of rich and fair, and to identify them with the name of Christ. And this went on, until churches rose in his honour, surmounted by the cross, and Christian preachers called aloud to the nations, "Behold your God!"

While we give due worth to tradition, let us still pierce through to that reality of all which is thus surrounded and obscured by the veil,—to that meek and lowly man, walking with God and with humanity, his heart full of love, his mind full of sublime and supporting thought, consorting with the wretched,—an incarnation of love upon earth, and that is an incarnation of God. The real life of Christ,—seek it not in wonders; look not for it in prodigies. Go see him with his hand upon the head of the child, giving a tenderer than paternal benediction. Hear his voice of consolation to the trembling penitent, shrinking under the rebuke of the self-righteous Pharisee. Mark him holding on in his course, in spite of opposition, calumny, persecution, and the prospect of death. Watch him kneeling in the garden of Gethsemane, in a fiercer agony than the death-struggle itself, praying,—"Father, if it be thy will, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done!"

LECTURE V.

ON THE SPECIFIC GOOD ACCOMPLISHED BY CHRISTIANITY, AS ILLUSTRATIVE OF THE LIFE AND CHARACTER OF CHRIST.

November 24th, 1850.

"BY their fruits ye shall know them" is one of those maxims of practical wisdom which Christ intermixed in his teaching with passages of much greater depth and beauty. Men are known by their works: their characters may be traced even ages after their death by the memorials which exist of what they accomplished. And by looking at the good which Christianity has effected in the world, we may find some light thrown upon the character of its founder. To endeavour to trace this is the object of the present discourse.

Men's works, I say, live after them, and tell of them; and especially their good works. One poet, indeed, has said that

> "On eagles' wings immortal scandals fly,
> While virtuous actions are but born to die."

But the truth is a very partial truth. Calumny is but as the cloud,—as dark, it may be, but as fleeting. There is an inherent and enduring power in good which evil does not, and cannot, possess. Another and a greater poet has said:

> "The evil that men do lives after them;
> The good is oft interrèd with their bones."

But then this is a falsehood, put into the mouth of a sophist, for the purpose of stirring up evil passions and exciting commotion. It is in enduring good that we trace out the great and the good of past ages. It is so with political institutions. We look on twelve men in a jury-box, and we remember Alfred. The name of Napoleon, at this moment, governs France,—the mere name,—by the acclamations of that very peasantry on whom his conscriptions bore so hardly, but who also felt and appreciated his wise administration, the justice and the impartiality of his civil government. A great work, a wise institution, a powerful book,—these live, and men live in them. There is something even in character which survives when the external acts of men all have passed away. "That was the abode of the Man of Ross," said the country cab-driver to a traveller. The tradition of the neighbourhood preserves the recollection of beneficence, as well as do the verses of the poet. In Christianity, then, and in its benefits, we may trace something of the life and character of Christ,—dissociating, as far as we can, that which sprang from the original source, from the various tributary streams of inferior purity which afterwards flowed into, mingled with, and stained its waters. For when, in reference to this subject, I speak of Christianity, I do not mean Pauline Christianity. Separate, as far as we can, the teachings of the great apostle of the Gentiles from those of Christ himself, and we shall find that their general tendency is rather to deteriorate than to preserve and to exalt. We owe much to Paul of an intermixture which has obscured the pure and beneficent doctrines of his Lord and Master. We owe to him the habit of dealing with texts,—of word-mongering, which derives almost any meaning from almost any language. We owe to him the introduction of metaphysical speculation into theology, by which it has been so deeply overclouded. We owe to him something of that dogmatical tone and acerbity in controversy which afterwards kindled up the persecuting spirit, and prompted some of its worst enormities. The mind of Paul was cast in an heroic mould,—he carried his life in his hand,—he cared not for opposition,—he was stimulated by persecution,—he delighted in the conflicts by means of which he asserted, and generally established, his authority. But still the portion of religious teaching which we owe to him, as compared with the previous Christianity, is distinguished by the spirit of power rather than by the spirit of love; and his dwelling was not with the sunshine and flowers of religion, but with its deepest recesses and its darkest shadows.

Nor are we, in endeavouring to throw light upon the true life and character of Christ from what Christianity has done, to take for granted every thing as the achievement of Christianity which has been ascribed to it. For, in reference to this matter, there have been most extravagant assertion and assumption. Christianity is sometimes spoken of as a great revelation of religious truth to the world. There is no evidence of this. Its greatest truths were previously known, cherished, taught, both in Judæa and in other countries. Its tenets of the Divine benignity,—of the unity and the universality of God,—of the common nature of man,—of a future life,—these were already the heritage of many sects, religions, and nations. They might be concentrated in the teachings of Christ, but they were previously known. Nor did Christianity even correct many glaring errors. It left the belief in a mighty spirit, rivalling and warring with the Almighty,—it left the belief in demons taking possession of human bodies, and speaking with their organs,—it left the faith in magic, as well as in miracle,—it left those many theological errors of the day, such as a local heaven, and the entrance into the world of death and suffering by sin, which the discoveries of science in later days have abated or corrected. Much of evil remained untouched by it. A history of the genuine results of Christianity is yet to be traced with an accurate and impartial pen. Many ameliorations in the condition of slaves and of women, and corrections of the evils of war, have been ascribed to it, in which the growing advances of civilisation have at least had a considerable share; and all these should be parted, as it were, when we endeavour to estimate the good which Christianity has really done, and from that good to argue to the character of its founder. Very much, indeed, will still remain, after the severest criticism on this point.

One of the most eminent is, a far higher respect than was ever before entertained for humanity in the condition of poverty. Christ taught the world to respect man in rags; and the greatest, the wisest, the best, see a brother in the wretched, the ignorant, and the vicious. This had never been so well achieved before. The doctrine of Judaism was, that prosperity was the mark of righteousness. The Stoics affected poverty, and, with their sordid garments, only made it and themselves ridiculous. Monkery took the vow of voluntary poverty; but the impoverishment of the individual was made coextensive with the enrichment of the community. The world still often estimates people by their possessions. But there is a better spirit abroad. The various institutions which have sprung up in connection with Christianity,—though some of them, it may be, are erroneous in their principle, and incidentally pernicious in their influence,—yet these tell the greater regard that is now felt for poverty. In the Romish Church, almsgiving is reckoned amongst the first of duties. Many nations have their poor-laws, by which, whatever the abuses, the right of humanity to existence and support is recognised. Hospitals are a creation of Christianity. Rome and Athens, in their palmiest days, did not possess a single institution of this kind. The first beatitude of the Sermon on the Mount has not been lost upon human nature. Even the very legends of the gospel confirm this impression. It is advanced by history and by tradition,—by the natural in the life of Christ, and the alleged preternatural,—by word and by conduct. The author of our religion was himself a poor man, born and nurtured in the rude lap of poverty,—his home, the carpenter's hut,—and, when he was abroad, without a place where to lay his head. The manger gave him a cradle; and the garden of a stranger furnished him with a grave. We look at him, then,—we are entitled to look at him, through the light of the principles and the conduct thus originated,—not as a patron of the poor, but as a brother,—as one who walked amongst them with a kindred spirit, and in a kindred condition, and who aggrandised them morally by declaring that of such was the kingdom of heaven.

There is another trait in Christianity which illustrates the character of its author: the greater deference to reason than to authority. There are, indeed, in many forms of Christianity, plenty of assumption, and plenty of servility. There are teachers who demand the prostration of the understanding at the very entrance upon the Christian profession. But this disposition has never in Christianity been unchecked or uncontradicted by a freer and bolder spirit. How many thousands there are who renounce all that the nurse and the priesthood have taught! Look at the long line of sturdy Nonconformists, dissenting from the religion of their country. Look at the brave Reformers who established Protestantism. Look at the martyrs who, in an earlier age, testified their adherence to the truth, at the expense of property, of liberty, of life itself. Whence comes all this spirit, but from him who corrected, not only the interpretations of the Mosaic law, but the law itself,—who, under a true and generous impulse, declared those elementary principles of all religion and morals which, once announced, establish themselves by their own reasonableness, demonstrate themselves by their own light. And whenever the human mind feels and exults in its own emancipation, let it bless God that, eighteen centuries ago, a Jewish peasant trod the soil of his country in freedom and in truth, and asserted the genuine dictates of his own heart and mind, in defiance of all taught by those who sat in the seat of Moses, and who claimed the highest authority for their interpretation and their legislation.

Then, again, Christianity has idealised the meek and humble phases of human character. It has done justice to the real heroism, which is not less real than that which is heralded by the trumpet's blast,—to the heroism of quiet endurance for the sake of good. It has been called the religion of the woman and the slave; and so, in a certain sense, it is. It appeals to their hearts,—it recognises the virtues which may exist in their condition,—it surrounds them with a beauty and a glory which the world has been apt to imagine is altogether reserved for deeds of arms, or for the establishment of political institutions. There is no recognition in Christianity of that vulgar glory which has been the world's Moloch,—which has stimulated to the shedding of human blood by torrents,—which has arrested the course of civilisation, and turned humanity back towards ages of barbarism,—which has so dazzled the fancy of poets and orators,—and which yet claims so prominent an ascendency in the homage which is even now rendered to conspicuous individuals by the public mind. However widely the delusion may still exist, it has no affinity with Christianity. A contrary mode of judging has been set up from the time that Christ recognised the poorest and lowliest as his brethren and sisters; and that better mode of judging has never disappeared from the earth. Even though the orator or the philosopher may build his pantheon of hero-worship,—rendering homage only to active energy,—there is in the world a sense of the truth, the beauty, the moral grandeur of passive endurance, of quiet, uncomplaining submission; and though there be no woman in that temple of heroes which some have raised, many a village Griselda has done and borne what, in moral worth and true heroism, entitled her to be reckoned worth them all. Even the legends of Christianity sanction this view of things. Long as the tale of the birth of Christ is told, will mankind recognise it as worthy to be the song of angels,—that ascription of "Glory to God in the highest, of peace on earth, and good-will amongst men."

Living as we do in an age when the elements of poetry, of wisdom, of grandeur, have been recognised in things heretofore regarded as mean and obscure,—when the very character of poetry has changed, and it has become so much less conventional,—consorts so much less with external power, and the glitter of earth's pomp,—and when its noblest aspirations and effusions have been connected with some of the obscurest and humblest scenes of human existence,—do we not here, too, see fruit borne after long ages, and through long ages, by that religion which originated in him who delighted not in the common-place figures and adornments of the poet and the orator, but in whatever was most natural, simple, and true to the common affections of the human heart? What are the illustrations of Christ in his teachings? He points to the lilies of the field, arrayed in their glory,—he points to the birds of the air; and when he meddles with things human, they are the common affections of child and parent which he makes the basis and the support of his parables. His delight was not in the conventionally great, but in whatever is true to the one human heart,—the source of all real goodness and of all real greatness. And so he pursued his course, bearing in mind the oneness of humanity, and its oneness also with infinite Deity. So he consorted with those who belonged to the masses; and not merely with those who by talent, by situation, or by wealth, had made themselves an exceptional destiny upon earth. He was ever one of the human race,—full of love as of wisdom, endeavouring to befriend all; and, therefore, at this remoteness of time, and through all the obscurities which mark certain portions of his history, we confidently look back to him as a true son of God, and as a real and loving brother of mankind..

LECTURE VI.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION.

December 1*st*, 1850.

For now upwards of two years all the lectures which I have delivered in this place may be said to have been on the same subject. They have been, in fact, a consecutive series, though distributed into different courses, and delivered with the interruption of various intervals. But they have still had the unity of topic and that of object. They have all related to the views originally laid down in the publication on *The Religious Ideas;* they have all had the tendency to show that religion is something internal, and not external to humanity; that it is the growth of our constitution, and not grafted upon that constitution; that if it comes, as it does undoubtedly, from heaven to man, it comes from heaven to man in his original organisation, and in his intellectual and moral tendencies, and in that point of view may yet be said to flow from man. All that is external I have regarded rather as the stimulus than as the source of religion. The external is an excitement to that which is within; it leads us to define it more distinctly to ourselves. It assists in the development of our conceptions of the Divine and the eternal. Sometimes there has been misleading in the external, and the pretensions of priests and of revelations have served to overcloud the light which is in "every man that cometh into the world," rather than to make it shine the brighter. But still knowledge has held on its course; and in the development of the religious ideas, taking the history of that development as a whole, there has undoubtedly been progress,—a past progress, the assurance of a future.

In the first of these courses I enumerated and endeavoured to describe the elementary religious ideas,—the materials of theology and of worship,—the simple principles which are in us, and which are there with a power like that of the letters of the alphabet, and capable, like them, of innumerable combinations. The notions of God, of providence, of duty, of heaven and hereafter,—these and similar conceptions passed before us in that first course in their simplicity and in their universality. In the next, I endeavoured to trace the influences and agencies which worked upon these; the effect of legislative enactment,—for the legislators, especially of antiquity, generally called religion to their aid, and endeavoured to enforce their laws and to uphold their institutions by its sanctions,—the effect of climate, of artistic taste and power, of ecclesiastical organisation; the tendencies of different forms of political government, and the advances of science;—these and other agencies were reviewed in their effect,—sometimes propitious and sometimes adverse to the development of the primeval religious conceptions. After this, I endeavoured to grapple with the various objections from very different quarters,—the sceptic and the Catholic, the Unitarian and the Trinitarian,—which were opposed to this view of religion; and passing through which, of course, a vast variety of incidental topics had to be noticed, and, as well as one was able, disposed of. We came then to the records, the history of religious thought, especially as bearing upon what may be called the secondary ideas of religion, which are usually made the primary ones in specific theologies; concluding with an endeavour to obtain some glimpse of the true life of Christ, and its moral significance; and that, not by legendary stories, not by dogmatical speculations, not by mere traditionary reports, but by such indications of life, heart, and character as are to be found, not in the traditionary, but in the authentic,—not in the preternatural, but in the natural,—not in that the evidence of which is continually decreasing, but in those works the spirit and life of which show continual progress,—by the harmony of those portions of the recorded life of Christ which are purely and perfectly natural,—by his unchanging summary of devotion and morality, as consisting in love to God and love to man,—by the marked contrast between his morality and the conventional, the proud, the lax, or the ascetic morality of the world,—by the character of his works, as those works remain amongst us;—by these we endeavoured to gain some view of what he was, of what he must have been,—a clearer view, I apprehend, than either creeds or legends can furnish the mind with.

I shall pursue this subject no further. In this last course, I set out with announcing that I should avoid the critical part of it, as scarcely proper for that rapid attention which is all that the hearer can give to the speaker. It requires earnest, reflective, persevering thought; and there are works before the world which, whether we incline to the historical or to the mythical view of Christ, furnish ample materials for those who are disposed to pursue these investigations. I allude to such works as *The Origin of Christianity,* by the late Mr. Charles Hennell; the more critical work, adapted to the mythical theory, of Professor Strauss; the work more philosophical than either, *The History of Christ, and the Establishment of Christianity,* by Salvador the Jew; the incidental aid which may be obtained from the publications of Newman and other writers of our own country; and, above all, the learned and elaborate work of Alexander Mackay, on the development of intellect amongst the Jews and the Greeks of antiquity, as evinced in their theologies. Here is ample work for the student; and it is by thoughtfulness on productions such as these that deep critical questions are to be answered, and not merely by what passes through the ear while listening for the few minutes that can be occupied in oral discussion. In pursuing this course,—by no means a usual one in addresses which are delivered in chapels or churches,—I am fully aware that I have levied a rather extraordinary tax on the attention of my hearers,—a tax which, with many audiences, might have been found not merely extraordinary, but prohibitory. That it has not been so with you is encouraging to those who think that the time is come to give to pulpit addresses a more intellectual, a more expansive, and at once a higher and a more useful character than they have too generally possessed. Still, this stretch of attention should not be carried on too far; and I feel that, as to this continuity of subject, the time is come for some pause, and for adverting to other and more miscellaneous topics, from which I have thus precluded myself, and you when hearing me, but which still are deserving of their proportionate share of attention. It is on this account that I have thus gone through the broad summary I have now given of the subjects by which your attention has been occupied for so long a period.

I shall only this morning make a very few remarks on questions which obviously arise, not merely out of the last section of the course, but out of the whole of it,—as to how these views of religion affect what is called personal piety, how they affect the regard in which we hold other religionists, how they should act upon public worship, and how they influence our views of the religious future.

They must have some effect upon our answer to all these questions. Personal religion: it cannot be, with these views, that course of feeling which has so often been described, and so often felt and regarded, as the very essence of religion. It is not compatible with these views that religion in the soul should begin with an intense consciousness of total depravity, with a sense of the desert of infinite punishment, of punishment amounting to excruciating torment, with vain struggles for relief from this condition, until some such doctrine as that of justification by faith dawn upon the mind, whereby the soul is taught to rest upon vicarious suffering and vicarious merits, resting on which it stands before the bar of the Almighty clothed with a righteousness not its own, and entitled to claim and lay hold of eternal bliss and glory. The religion which begins with this sense of depravity and ill-desert, and ends with this strong and unshaken assurance of an everlasting heaven, is a phase of religious feeling that bears no harmony with the views I have put before you. The sense of imperfection, the knowledge of broken resolutions and violated promises, the memory of many shortcomings,—these, and the impulses thence derived, do unite and blend with the views I have stated; but these belong to man as a progressive being, as one who may begin in the dust of the earth, but who looks up to heaven, and in due time ascends thitherward. They do not imply what has been called the fall and restoration of humanity; but they take man as the feeble, erring child of God, liable to aberrations, great and gross ones, but still with a germ in him of the good and the glory towards which he aspires. Combined with these views, there can be no such supposed total demarcation, an impassable abyss, between the happy and the miserable, as has often been described, and most graphically depicted. These conceptions of religion do not part the world into the regenerate and the unregenerate, the elect and the non-elect, the children of God and the children of the devil. They do no such thing. In accordance with them, we perceive a boundless diversity of character, of disposition, of temperament,—a diversity which affects what we are, and what we enjoy or suffer here; which affects that amount of enjoyment and of suffering in infinite gradations; and in like manner will, in all probability, affect our condition hereafter, in the life which we hope to realise when our mortal course terminates. Of course there can be, with these views, none of the deep degradation and despair, nor any of the proud and swelling assurance, which other modes of faith delight to exhibit in their votaries. There is only a frequently imperceptible but gradual growth of the good seed which is within our bosoms, which is implanted by our very natures, helped or obstructed from without, as the case may be, but still bearing the same character. Other views may be in harmony with the desolating storm and the brilliant rainbow which follows: these are better imaged by the plant, which breaks through the covering soil, puts up its tender stem, unfolds its leaves in the sunshine, and yet is nourished by the descending shower, ministered to by the various elements of earth, air, and water, pursuing its gradual growth, and protected for a time even by the frosts and snows of winter in its seeming grave, until the period arrive for its natural resurrection.

I answer next the question, how these views affect the regard in which you hold other religionists. To those with whom there is one true religion, there must also be many false religions. The same notions which lead them to dwell upon particular dogmas or precepts as the one true religion, will also teach them that false religions are fatal. They firmly look upon a world not only lying in sin and wickedness, but predestined—the great majority of its teeming millions—to the judgment of condemnation, to an everlasting continuity of torment. They recognise no religion beyond the bounds of their own true religion. Others' gods to them are demons. So it was with the fathers of the Church. All senseless and unconscious of the beautiful and lofty thoughts embodied in many conceptions of the Greek mythology, they saw nothing in the impersonate power of majesty or of wisdom but the incarnation of demons, permitted to mislead their votaries by fallacious oracles. Such was the prevailing and orthodox doctrine of the Church. They turned aside from all that might strike the eye or charm the mind; only demons to them were all the great and the beautiful of Greece, by which Divinity was made to dwell in the dark grove, in the sunny plain, in the bright river, in the resounding waves. These impersonations they held all abhorrent, as so many inventions of the evil one, stratagems of "him who goeth about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour." And this spirit of so judging is now extant. Continually we send out ignorant missionaries to distant lands, who see representations of the Deity perhaps scarcely more grotesque than some to which their minds, if not their senses, are accustomed in their own country; and they forthwith tell us how many worshipers of the devil they have found, and how he holds the people in slavery and in darkness. With a comfortable consciousness of their own possession of the one and only truth, they would—were such men alive now—have told Socrates that, with all his moral questionings, he had nothing spiritual in him; and Plato, with his sublime speculations on Divinity, that he had no knowledge of God. Nay, if we are to take what they thought, according to the Old-Testament record, they would not have scrupled to tell Abraham and Moses that they were deplorably ignorant of the way of salvation. They tell us of "benighted heathen," and of the millions "who are perishing for lack of knowledge." Nor does this spirit cease when we come within the bounds of nominal Christianity; it is quite as strong as in reference to those without. The Protestant world believes the Papal to be in a state of condemnation, and the Papal world retorts the compliment upon the Protestant. Nay, many a sect sets up, with its own little, narrow, cut-and-dried creed, and with its small band of fanatics, and thinks it has got the one true and only way of salvation, and that all without is under the wrath and curse of God.

Now, no feeling of this sort can harbour under the shelter of the views I have been endeavouring to enforce. We do not see this division of the world. We do not claim this superlative truth. We look at the tendencies of the most ignorant, and see the germ of religion there; at the thoughts of the wisest, and behold there more, and only a little more, development of those germs. If ecclesiastical dignities were conferred in proportion to religious knowledge, then even pope or archbishop must confess that they only worship an unknown God; and the idolaters of ancient Athens, without Bible or apostle, did as much. Man is every where inquiring—every where, where there is a sincere spirit in religion, striving to know something more, something better of the divine, the unseen, the eternal. And let them strive, in all their gradations, and with all their diversities of means and opportunities. We should look on with complacence, rather than with condemnation. We should rejoice that they are so striving, and humbly trust, however deceived some of his children may be in the mode in which they think to honour him, that the universal Parent looks down on all benignantly, and graciously accepts their varied offerings.

How should these views affect Divine worship? They should divest it of the arbitrary, the unmeaning, the mere ceremonial, the conventional in words as well as the formal in action. How continually has worship been made to consist in the repetition of words, in the practice of genuflexions, sacrifices, and so on, which, if they once had a meaning, have long since lost it to those who still practise them as religious homage! The forms and mode of worship should harmonise with the character, with the intellectuality, with the simplicity, and yet with the variety, and with the progressive and diversified character of religion in the heart. The silent symbol without should correspond with the principle within. I know that it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to work this thought out; our conventionalisms, our traditions, are all against it. The limitation of resource in any body not very numerous and wealthy is against it, and fatal to it. Else, one would wish to see religion calling forth all the faculties to which in its nature it appeals. One would have it diversified in its expression as the tendencies of the human constitution and the varieties of nature without. As nature worships God, as his temple is the broad green earth and the starry arch above, and his hymn the song of birds, and its accompaniment the anthem of the everlasting ocean,—so we would desire to see art respond to nature, and whatever its power can yield of the grand or the beautiful consecrate to this object. And if this may not be, if it harmonise not with the limited means of the few who see their way to this, and view it as a desirable object,—we may yet do something. We may substitute for the doggerel of third-rate rhymers the language of those in whom dwelt the fire of genius, on whom descended the spirit of true inspiration; we may look to the great men of our country and of other countries, and say: "Be ye our ministers, our priests, our choristers; let your language—the holiest of language, because the language of the greatest and noblest minds that God has raised up—become our language when we would worship the greatest and the best of beings, celebrate his praises, and seek his benediction." Of the discourses, as to subject and character, which should accompany such worship, I have already spoken.

And what the future of religion may be is a topic on which we can say little more than that doubtless it will harmonise with the past, will be the true providential continuation of the past, and that the agencies and influences which have hitherto worked for good will continue so to work until their object is entirely accomplished. In the past, we find grosser forms of religion giving way to purer. We find large masses of people, nations, entertaining conceptions from which their posterity, not very many generations afterwards, would have revolted with condemnation and abhorrence. We find more benignant conceptions of Deity and providence taking possession of the minds of those who yet adhere to the name, the faith, the forms of their ancient superstition. We find that science has corrected many errors in theology, and has made many revelations of the wisdom and the goodness of Deity. More and more of this sort of light will flow upon the mind. The articles of a creed, the contents of a book, may command human intelligence to pause in religious matters, may say practically: "Thus far shalt thou come, but no farther;" but there is something in the beam of higher intelligence, as it falls upon the page, that baffles all these contrivances. The more enlightened man sees more light in the same proposition, in the same words. He sees a purer and a clearer light; not because the proposition or the article is different, but because his own mind is progressive, and has advanced beyond those by whom the book was concocted, or by whom, in former times, the book was received and believed. The growing intelligence of man makes all things more intelligent, gives greater brightness to the star, and sweetness to the flower; it beholds in nature revelations hidden from the gross eye of ignorance. And this takes place, not merely in Protestantism, or in Christianity, or in modern Theism, or in any specific form: it takes place wherever and whenever the human mind is on the advance; there religion seems to advance also, because it is contemplated by a grander species of intellect.

Why may we not suppose, then, that there will be an approximation to unity of conception, though consistent with great diversity,—that there will be an approximation in mankind,—not by this or that religion making proselytes,—not by grand victories of Protestantism over Popery, or of Christianity over Mahometanism, or of Mahometanism over idolatry, or of the better forms of idolatry over the worse species,—not by these,—not by sectarian or theological victories, or proselyting,—but by the advance of mind, and that higher consequent purity of heart, in those trained up in all religions, by which they will come to understand better their Father who is in heaven. And in this way, may we not hope to find that the visions of the Hebrew bards will be realised—realised in a sense higher than they meant when uttering such anticipations, higher than that in which their anticipations even yet are construed by those who make them the oracles of a specific religion; and that, in the great providential plan of God, man will advance to oneness with God, and that the visions of those bards will thus be fulfilled who predicted that "the knowledge of God shall cover the earth as the waters cover the channels of the mighty deep,"—flowing over all systems, flowing around all altars and temples,—a mighty, a boundless ocean of piety, love, and happiness!

END OF VOL. IX.

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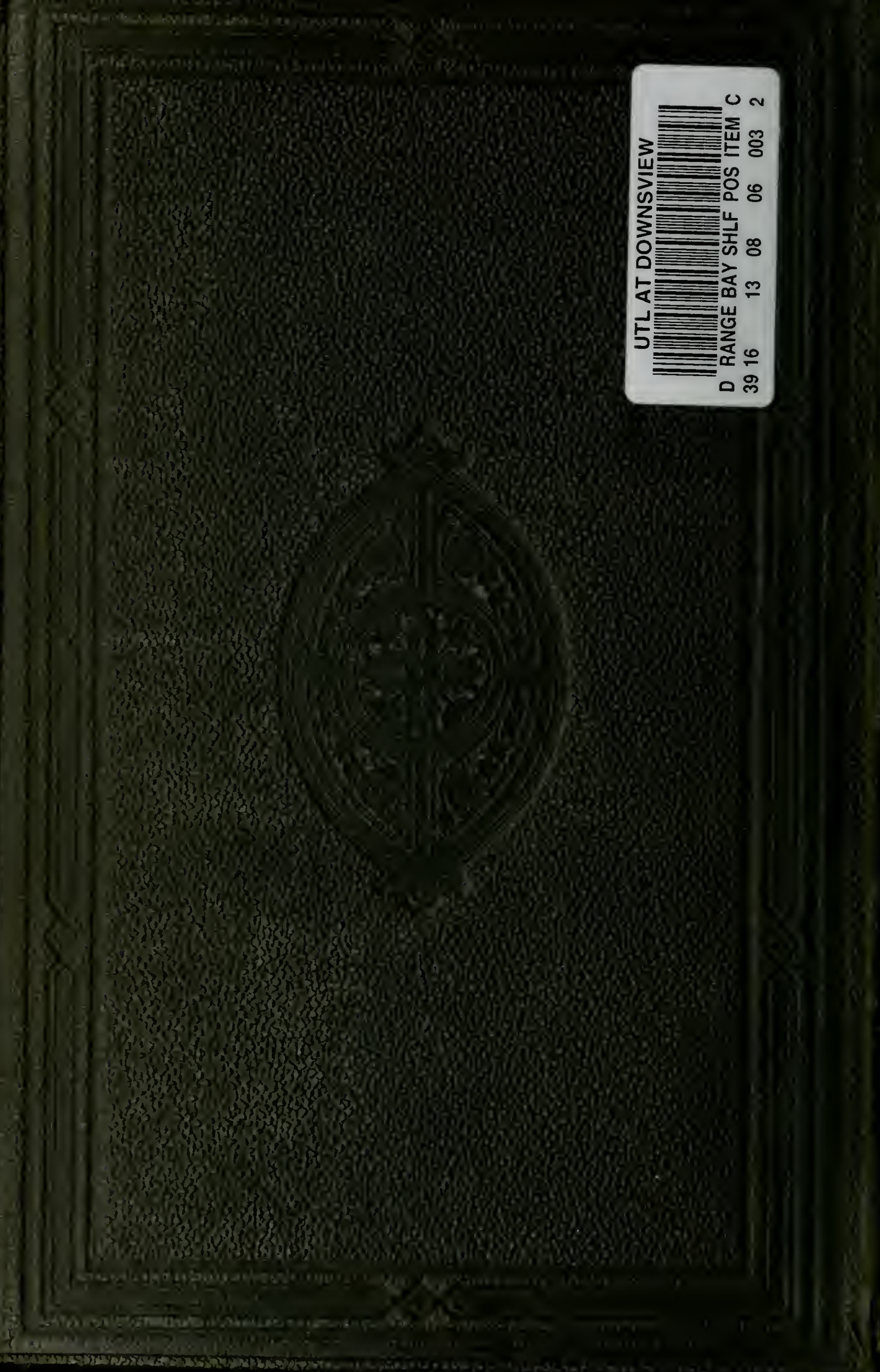

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